THE NEW DEMOCRAT

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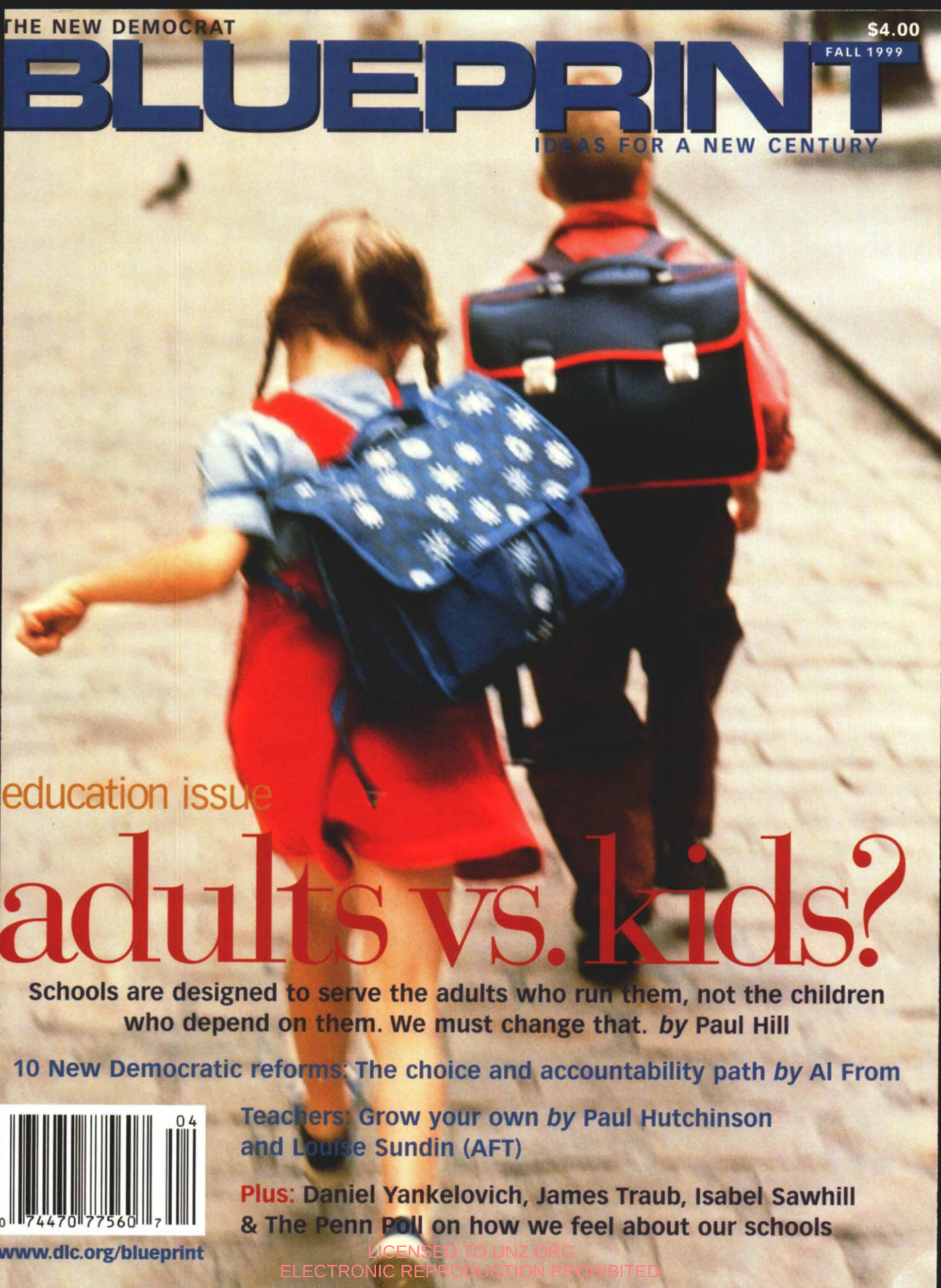
IDEAS FOR A NEW CENTURY



education issue

adults vs. kids?

Schools are designed to serve the adults who run them, not the children who depend on them. We must change that. ***by*** **Paul Hill**

10 New Democratic reforms: The choice and accountability path ***by*** **Al From**

Teachers: Grow your own ***by*** **Paul Hutchinson and Louise Sundin (AFT)**

Plus: Daniel Yankelovich, James Traub, Isabel Sawhill & The Penn Poll on how we feel about our schools

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"The tools for lifting the performance of both mediocre suburban schools and abysmal inner city schools are the same: set high standards, offer parents and students a choice of competitive public schools and demand real accountability."
—Al From, New Democrats' 10 key reforms for revitalizing American education, page 2.

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New Democrats' 10 key reforms

for revitalizing American education

The challenge for all of our schools is to give students the skills they need to succeed in the New Economy — and as American citizens.

AS THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION RESHAPED AMERICAN SOCIETY AT THE beginning of this century, the philosopher John Dewey wrote: "Our social life has undergone a thorough and radical change. If our education is to have any meaning for life, it must pass through an equally complete transformation." Out of that impetus, the 20th century public school system was born.

Today, at century's end, new forces are again altering American life. Skills and innovation drive growth and prosperity in the New Economy of the Information Age. Changes in our social structure require a new balance between work and family. Global economic competition means that American schools must be transformed again.

But before any profound change can occur, we first need an honest assessment of the status quo.

Today, America is a tale of two public school systems: one that works reasonably well, although it could certainly be better, and one that is by almost any standard a disaster. The one that's enjoying reasonable success is found in affluent and suburban communities, where most students stay in school and continue their education after high school. Despite great pockets of mediocrity, test scores in these schools often compare favorably with our global competitors, and parents, for the most part, are satisfied.

The school system that is failing is found in poor communities. Dropout rates are high, and even the students who graduate often lack the skills to get jobs. Test scores are abysmal — worse than almost any other developed country. Satisfied parents are almost non-existent.

The challenge for both systems is the same: to give students the skills they need to succeed in the New Economy and to fully participate in American life as citizens. But they are very different in degree. The challenge for urban school systems is urgent: they need a complete overhaul. The dramatic turn-around of the Chicago public schools is encouraging, but unfortunately, an anomaly. Millions of youngsters in too many big cities are being denied the quality education they need for an equal opportunity to climb the economic ladder. Suburban school systems must also improve to meet the challenges of the New Economy. But their challenge is to root out mediocrity where it exists.

And while parents, not governments or schools, bear the responsibility for raising children, schools can no longer be norm-free zones. Schools are where children become young adults and learn the habits of American citizens. The curriculum, and the learning environment, must reflect and reinforce the values that bind us as Americans. Schools must become repositories not only of knowledge, but of standards; not only of learning, but of values. They should at once encourage individual achievement, demand discipline, and reinforce community.

by Al From

Al From is the president of the Democratic Leadership Council and Publisher of Blueprint.

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Today, America is a tale of two public school systems: one that could certainly be better, and one that is by almost any standard a disaster. The one that is failing is found in impoverished communities. Test scores are absolutely abysmal — worse than almost any other developed country. Satisfied parents are almost non-existent.

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Schools must become repositories not only of learning, but of values. Above all, they should be safe.

See "The little things on the way to Littleton" by George F. Kelling, page 32.

Above all, they should be safe.

The tools for lifting the performance of both mediocre and abysmal schools are the same: set high standards, offer parents and students public school choice with real competition among schools, and demand real accountability.

Despite the clear need for change and many commendable efforts at reform, the bottom line is that the kind of systemic overhaul necessary to offer all students a high quality public education is not taking place. That's why the time has come for a whole new look at public education — not just inching ahead with incremental reforms, but a total transformation of how we educate our children.

In this issue of *Blueprint,* we present some of the most innovative thinking on school reform today. Our writers discuss a broad full range of challenges to our educational system, and present compelling possible solutions.

To spark the discussion, *Blueprint* also offers its own list of 10 key ideas for retooling public education for the Information Age. Taken together, these reforms would transform the school system from one designed to serve the adults who run them, not the children who depend on them.

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1 PROVIDE CHOICE WITH CHOICES. Our public education system is still too monopolistic. In too many cases, it offers a "one-size-fits-hardly-anyone" model that strangles excellence and innovation. We must offer parents a plethora of choices about what types of public schools their children may attend. Giving them the freedom to make those choices unleashes the power of market competition where it is needed most.

For nearly two decades, blue ribbon commissions have produced volume after volume of recommendations on how to improve public schools. However, the guardians of the status quo — members of the education establishment — have had little incentive to change. We need a public school system where the choice for failing schools is simple: Change or perish.

After ten years and thousands of successful models, it is time to declare that charter schools work. These flexibly organized schools — which receive relief from red tape in exchange for results — have become oases of innovation in a larger desert of monopolistic and cookie-cutter schools. The time has come to bring life to the rest of the desert — by introducing the same forces of choice and competition to every public school in America.

We should rid ourselves of the rigid notion that public schools are defined by who owns and operates them. In the 21st century, a public school should be any school that is of the people (accountable to public authorities for its results), by the people (paid for by the public), and for the people (open to the public and geared toward public purposes). The school system of the future should be a network of accountable schools of all shapes, sizes, and styles with their own decision-making authority — each of which competes against the others for its students.

For numbers 1 and 2, see "Give kids a choice" by Paul Hill, page 8.

2 MAKE EVERY SCHOOL A HIGH-PERFORMANCE SCHOOL. Every school should be forced to sign a performance contract that sets clear goals for student achievement. Using all the carrots and sticks we have at our disposal, schools should be impelled to reach these goals. Those that fail would have their licenses revoked and be shut down. In diverse neighborhoods all over America there are examples of schools that work and provide their students with a real education. We should not tolerate anything less.

See "Subject matters" by James Traub, page 24.

3 INSTITUTE NATIONAL STANDARDS AND TESTING. If parents are to wisely choose schools for their children, and if schools are to bring real results in the classroom, we need a clear sense of where we are and where we are headed. To understand our starting point in this journey, we must have a comprehensive and cohesive national model for standards and testing. Yet the notion of "national testing" strikes fear and loathing in many political hearts. Too many Republicans are scared off by the word "national;" too many Democrats are worried by the word "testing." Yet national standards and testing do not necessarily mean prescriptions imposed from on-high by the federal government. Instead, America's governors could agree on core standards to be embedded in assessments across state lines. To push them in this direction, the federal government should tie its education dollars to the states' imposing core standards and testing.

See "Teachers, teachers, teachers," interview of William Sanders, page 23, and "The need to know test" by Michelle Tolbert, page 29.

4 PUSH SCHOOLS TOWARD A 12/12 SCHEDULE. In an Information Age with 24/7 cash flows and business cycles, our antiquated public school calendar is still based on the pace and seasons of farm life. Schools should examine ways to operate year round, giving children more instruction time and minimizing the learning they lose over the long summer vacation when working parents must scramble for day care. In addition, public schools should no longer observe "school day" hours. Instead,

See "Open door policy" by Joy Dryfoos, page 61.

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their doors should be open longer. These extra hours should be used to give children more time to learn and to keep them off the streets while their parents are at work. Schools should also be centers for lifelong learning and community activities. Private and nonprofit operators, using school facilities, can help fill this void. Moving from a nine-month calendar and a seven-hour day toward a 12-month/12-hours-a-day schedule is the best way to advance these goals.

See "Kids need an early start" by Isabel Sawhill, page 36.

5 INSTITUTE UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO PRESCHOOL FOR ALL CHILDREN. Even as we keep students in school for more of the day and the year, we should expand the amount of time they spend learning. As the Industrial Age picked up steam, it became apparent that a high school education was needed for success. In the Information Age, no one disputes the need for post-secondary learning. We must also recognize the importance of pre-kindergarten instruction. Numerous studies have shown that the early years of a child's development play a disproportionate role in shaping its future cognitive abilities. At a time when parents are trying harder than ever to juggle work and family, an investment in universal pre-kindergarten is both timely and urgent.

For numbers 6 and 7, See "Grow your own teachers" by Peter Hutchinson and Louise Sundin, page 16, and "Teachers, teachers, teachers" page 23.

6 PAY TEACHERS MORE, BASED ON THE IMPROVEMENT THEY BRING TO THEIR STUDENTS — AND END TEACHER TENURE AS WE KNOW IT. At the core of education is the relationship between teacher and student. Both intuition and research show that good teachers are critical. However, because of low pay and tough working conditions, too few of our brightest young people become teachers. Those talented students who do choose teaching rarely teach in the worst schools — the ones most in need of creativity, energy, and idealism. Worse, teachers — unlike doctors, lawyers, and other professionals — are not usually compensated on the basis of performance.

This should change. Teachers who add value to the classroom by bringing measurable improvements to their students over the course of the school year should receive bonuses commensurate with the increase in their students' achievements. Teachers who perform best should be rewarded most. A performance-reward pay scale would add a material incentive to a teacher's professional and personal dedication to do well by their students. It would also be society's concrete statement of the value of the teacher's work. Special rewards should be offered to teachers who work in the most troubled schools — those where students have the greatest possibility to improve.

While we should pay good teachers more, we shouldn't tolerate bad ones. America's children deserve at least that much.

When President Clinton, as a candidate in 1992, called for an end to "welfare as we know it," it struck a chord with the American people because welfare represented a system at odds with the basic American values of work, family, and personal responsibility. Today, the practice of teacher tenure — which gives educators a virtual lock on their jobs regardless of how they perform — offends those same values. While we should pay good teachers more, we shouldn't tolerate incompetent teachers at all. America's children deserve at least that. Teachers — like every other employee in the country — should have protection from being fired capriciously or arbitrarily, but they should not be kept in the classroom if they are not up to the job.

7 LET THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST TEACH. In today's public school system, Bill Gates couldn't teach a class in computer science, Maya Angelou couldn't teach an English course, and Stephen Hawking couldn't teach students physics. That's because education schools still have a stranglehold on who is allowed to enter the classroom. We should certify teachers based on their abilities and knowledge, not on the basis of a degree from an education school.

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8 CREATE A NATIONAL TEACHER CORPS. To tap into the determination and energy of young people who want to serve their country as teachers in the toughest schools, we should create a National Teacher Corps where future teachers are sent to the neediest schools in exchange for help in paying for college.

See "Corps values" by William A. Galston, page 19.

9 ENSURE THAT CHARACTER EDUCATION IS PART OF THE CORE CURRICULUM. Schools must do more than teach the basic three R's; they must also teach young people about responsibility, reliability, and respect. Children are not born fully formed, but need to be taught the difference between right and wrong. Parents have the primary obligation in this regard, yet schools must play their part in forming the character of young Americans.

See Mark Penn's poll, page 50.

10 GIVE NON-COLLEGE BOUND HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES A SKILL DEVELOPMENT OPTION. The New Economy places a high premium on a college education. As a result, the income gap between college graduates and high school graduates is widening. To address this gap, we need new post-high-school institutions that do not sharply separate "training" and "education" as colleges — and that employers view as imparting skills needed for workplace performance at levels as high or higher than four-year colleges. The nation's two-year community colleges are ideally suited to the task.

See "A different kind of success" by Daniel Yankelovich, page 44.

Horace Mann, the father of America's public schools, called education "the balance wheel of social machinery." Today, for many students that balance is seriously off-kilter. By failing to institute substantial change to our public schools, we doom millions to a bleak future and hinder millions more from reaching their dreams. For Democrats — and for all Americans — the drive to truly improve public education is a test of whether all children are to be afforded the same shot at success that is given to our most privileged children. The future of America will be determined by how well we meet that test.

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Give *kids* a choice

With choice, we can create schools that keep promises about high performance, and shut down those that don't.

Here is an American paradox: We celebrate public education as a bulwark of democracy, yet tolerate public schools that perpetuate the disadvantages of poor children. Are we a nation of hypocrites? Or is something else going on?

We are not a nation of hypocrites, but we confuse the goals of public education with the means by which we provide it. As a result, a rigid, unproductive set of institutions has gained protection it does not deserve.

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by Paul T. Hill

Nearly half of the students of Boston Renaissance School — one of the nation's largest charter schools — come from low-income families.

There is a better way: We can use competition to create schools that make and keep promises about high performance, and we can shut down those that do not make the grade.

But due to confusion of means and ends, proposals that might make public schools more effective and create new opportunities for children who are now tragically ill-served are sometimes characterized as threats to public education. Moreover, practices that now make schools ineffective are mistaken as defining virtues of public education.

What Is Public Education?

We struggle with two competing definitions of public education. The first is that public education is a commitment to specific political bargains, programs, job rights, and bureaucratic oversight. The second is that public education is a commitment to use any means necessary to ensure that every child learns enough to be able to participate fully as a citizen, earner, and parent.

The difference between these two definitions of public education is evident everywhere, but most painfully in the big cities. Aspirations are high for student learning, racial justice, and introducing disadvantaged students into the mainstream. Political and education leaders talk endlessly about the importance of high standards. But current arrangements are not capable of meeting our aspirations for public education. In the 50 largest cities and in many rural areas, public schools cannot teach students to read on grade level. Minority students fall further behind the longer they are in school, and more than half of them drop out before gaining a regular high school diploma.

A New Democrat from Mars would expect government and civic leaders to be desperately searching for new ways to bring all students into society's mainstream and for educators to be experimenting with many new ways of providing effective schools for disadvantaged children. Someone would have to explain to her that leaders and educators are frozen by confusion of means and ends, and that the people who run and staff public schools have convinced everyone that the current arrangements are public education.

The way we now educate poor children isn't acceptable because it does not work. Except in a few wealthy suburban areas (and New York City's truly unique Community District 2), public school systems are designed to do almost everything but provide good schools. School board politics constantly disrupt schools, mandating new methods and programs to be piled on top of old ones. Schools can't choose their teachers, and senior teachers can cluster in the best neighborhoods, leaving the most challenging schools to be staffed by the least qualified adults. Because senior teachers cost more than twice as much as new teachers, the real expenditure per pupil can be more than twice as much in the "nicer" schools as in those in poor neighborhoods. Few schools have good principals, partly because the supply is artificially limited to self-starters who get irrelevant "administrator" certificates, and partly because as soon as a school starts to improve, the central office yanks out its principal to assign her to another catastrophic school.

These arrangements, emphasizing the interests of the system over the performance of individual schools, come from political entrepreneurship by groups that want to protect jobs, stabilize particular programs,

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Good schools aren't all alike. A good school can fit one child perfectly and be all wrong for another. That's why parents need choices.

and maintain interest groups' influence on schools.

Although some localities have good schools, good schools are the exception in poor rural areas. Only a school with external funding sources (foundations, businesses), or a principal with political influence, can gain the freedom to hire teachers that fit its instructional program, to pursue a consistent approach to teaching , and to keep its leader.

Some people benefit from the system: school board members who can make patronage appointments, people with permanent central office jobs, teachers unions, and parents who know how to get what they want for their children. In many cities the bedrock support comes from middle-class parents who have worked the system to get the best teachers and special school assignments for their children and who then support "public education" because of its commitment to equity.

Boston Renaissance: "The idea was to create a catalyst, an engine, a symbol of what you could have in an urban setting," according to Bob Gaudet, a school founder. With longer school days and years, Renaisance has a broad-based curriculum, including athletic programs and extensive use of new technology.

How to Start Educating the Public's Children

What is the alternative? We need to find a way to pursue the goals of public education without the constraints that have made their attainment impossible.

The basic answer is right before our eyes. There are three keys to educating the public's children: First, support schools, not systems, by creating mechanisms like charters and school contracting that allow schools to focus on teaching and to keep their promises about what children will learn. Second, ensure that teachers, principals, and parents have the freedom of action necessary to create and sustain schools that work for particular groups of children. Third, withdraw public support and let families escape from schools that do not work by encouraging formation of promising new schools to replace failed ones.

Good schools are intimate places where teachers and other adults stand in for parents and accept the responsibility of making sure children learn things they will need to function as adults. Not all good schools are alike. A good school has definite ideas about what students should learn at a particular time, and how. Such a school can fit one child perfectly and be all wrong for another. That is why every school should be well-defined and

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Located in the heart of downtown, Boston Renaissance is one of the nation's largest charter public schools. The K-8 school grew out of a partnership between a local foundation and the Edison Project, a company that operates more than 50 public schools nationwide. "The idea was to create a catalyst, an engine, a symbol of what you could have in an urban setting," according to Bob Gaudet, a school founder. Renaissance has quickly emerged as a model, serving a student body in which nine in ten are children minorities and nearly half come from low-income families.

Though large, Boston Renaissance creates an intimate environment by dividing its more than 1,000 students into "houses" of just over 100 children. Teachers get to know students — they stay with the same ones for several years. Renaissance packs a challenging curriculum and proven instructional methods into longer school days (seven to eight hours) and school years (over 200 days). The school gives each family and teacher a computer for the home.

Perhaps the best indicator of Boston Renaissance's success is that families are clamoring to enroll — the waiting list numbers more than 1,500. In an urban system where good options are scarce, Boston Renaissance fills a vital need.

—Bryan Hassel

free to follow a consistent approach to teaching and learning. That is also why parents should have choices.

If every school is free to follow a definite approach to instruction, schools in any locality will be diverse, not regulated into uniformity. Teachers, like parents, must also have options, and community leaders must constantly seek to strengthen their portfolios, adding promising new schools and pruning those on the bottom.

These principles work. Chartering creates a new supply of public schools by allowing new organizations — and teacher and parent groups, social service providers, colleges and universities, museums and libraries — to design and operate public schools. It also allows existing public schools to take full responsibility for instructional quality and performance improvement. Charter schools, free to improve their methods and forced to attract parents, work hard to say what teachers will do and what students will learn. Moreover, charter schools that cannot come together in these ways are often forced to change leadership or close their doors.

My own proposal for "reinventing"

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Important problems must be solved. Parents must know their options. And existing public schools must gain the flexibility to adapt and compete for students.

public education would make chartering universal. Elected officials would set goals and standards and hold schools accountable for performance, but bureaucracies would not operate any schools. Every public school would be an independent organization, operating under a performance contract. Schools would receive a set dollar amount for every child they enrolled and could use the money to hire teachers and administrators and to buy instructional materials and services.

A public school would then be any school that operated under a performance contract with a state or local education authority, accepted public funds as full tuition for its pupils, and was open to all students. Most contract public schools would evolve from public schools existing today and would be run by teacher and parent groups. Some, however, would be run by new nonprofits and even profit-making firms. Whether religious groups could operate contract schools, and under what conditions, would depend on applicable Supreme Court decisions. Public authorities could not contract with groups that practiced hate speech or advocated violent solutions to social problems.

Problems in Creating a New Supply of Public Schools

Not all contract and charter public schools will be wonderful. Some of the nations' more than 1,300 charter schools are struggling. Furthermore, some public agencies authorized to establish charter or contract schools have done a poor job, letting in bad providers or driving out capable school leaders by micromanaging.

However, school contracting and chartering share a major advantage over the current arrangements for providing public education: They support a constant search for better options. Parents can remove children from schools where they are not learning and seek alternatives; public authorities can remove the charters or contracts of low-performing schools; and new schools can form to compete for students. Under the current system, schools can fail for generations; good schools that arise are not imitated or reproduced; and children are held in failing schools by rules that tie school attendance to home address and by the lack of alternatives.

These important problems must be solved. First, we must find a way to reconcile public oversight with school effectiveness. Legislatures, school boards, and school system bureaucracies have proved themselves incapable of exercising day-to-day control without impinging on schools' necessary freedom of action. Second, we must find a way to make sure parents know their options and can make informed choices. Public school systems have never been candid about the performance of individual schools, and charter and contract schools have strong incentives to report only good news. Moreover, parents, conditioned to being told what school their children will attend, need help learning to make choices. Third, we must find a way to prevent harm to children who stay behind in conventional public schools as more and more parents enroll their children in the new public schools. Most public school systems now spend all their money on big, inflexible programs and are not good at adapting to changes in scale.

These problems can be solved, and the fact that they exist is no reason to sustain a public education system that is not designed to provide good schools.

Reconciling public oversight with school effectiveness requires innovation in government. Public officials who make rules for schools must not be free to change the ground rules willy-nilly. Long-term contracts between public officials and school providers will both maintain public oversight and buffer schools from micromanagement by politicians and bureaucrats. Legislation that takes school boards entirely out of the business of running schools and employing teachers can dramatically reduce opportunities for political patronage. Most importantly, clear standards for school performance, based on demonstrated relationships between what students know at a particular age and their subsequent chances for success, can provide valid bases for performance accountability.

Official oversight of school performance

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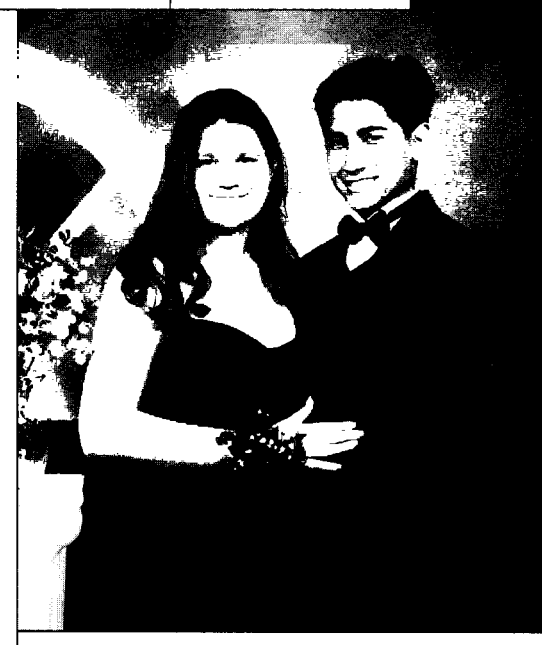
Phillip Dhingra, a junior at Rancho Bernardo High School in San Diego, was part of a three-student international team that won the 1998 ThinkQuest Internet Challenge in graphic design. ThinkQuest is an international program for students ages 12 through 19 that encourages them to use the Internet to create web-based educational materials. The three young men, each of whom had an adult adviser, won $20,000 scholarships to the colleges of their choice.

When I was 13, I came up with a computer gaming site called Exscape. One of the main things I like about the web is that I can put something up there that anyone can see. You know, when you're a little kid, the only way of communicating with the wider world is by having a lemonade stand or something. But if you put your project on the web, it's there 24 hours a day, seven days a week, worldwide. I basically treated the site like a magazine, where I would get volunteers from across the Internet who wanted to write reviews on games, and then we put them online for other people to see.

When ThinkQuest first started sponsoring the Internet Challenge in 1996, I read about it in the newspaper but didn't enter. The next year I heard that the person who won the grand prize in 1996 had been contacted by Stanford University and asked to apply. Well, I really want to go to Stanford, so I'm like, 'If I win this contest, that's my ticket.'

My two teammates, Garrett Hamann from Texas and Tobias Kohler from Germany, were both finalists in 1997, and so was I. We met at the awards ceremony that year. Part of the judging criteria is the international diversity of your teammates. The larger the challenge you take on, the larger the boundaries that separate you from your teammates, the more points you score. So it's an incentive to work with students from around the world, from different time zones, different cultural backgrounds.



Dhingra and his prom date. He and two e-mail buddies from Texas and Germany took on the web and won college scholarships from Thinkquest.

"When you're a little kid, the only way of communicating with the wider world is by having a lemonade stand or something. But if you put your project on the web, it's there 24 hours a day, seven days a week, worldwide."

The three of us scheduled weekly meetings through online chat rooms. We'd also communicate via e-mails. We divided up the site into three different tasks: programming, graphics, and content development. I did the graphics and the design. Then one person, which was me, took all the pieces and put them together. The only time we all met together was at the awards ceremony when we won.

The idea for our multimedia web site, which we called EgyptWorld, came from Garrett. He wanted to create a site based on an ancient civilization because he wanted to make a game where someone could be the Pharaoh or king and run an empire. And Tobias wanted to do Egypt because he knew a little bit of the hieroglyphic language.

I think I learned far more about Egypt working on this computer design project than I ever would have studying it in a class. I just went to see the movie "The Mummy," and I kept seeing all these inaccuracies.

The project required that I work really hard and also work well with my teammates. When you say things online, emotion doesn't exist, so you have to communicate in a way that properly conveys your meaning. It was really hard at first with my teammates because I couldn't tell whether they were being sarcastic, humorous, sad, happy, angry, or whatever.

Right after winning, I got a couple of job offers from some local Internet startups. I'm currently employed at a company called Go2 Systems. Plus I have my own web design company that I started with my coach from EgyptWorld. And I'm not even out of high school yet!

—Interview by Marilyn Snell

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plus family choice is a formula for ensuring that schools are accountable both to the public and to parents. Good performance standards, based on evidence about what children really need to know and cannot do without, and secure, cheat-proof testing will give parents a language to discuss and a basis for judging schools. The federal government has a role in promoting such standards.

Most localities will need to create positions for independent public authorities whose only job is to analyze, report on, and inform parents about school performance. (The claim, made by defenders of the status quo, that poor parents don't know or care enough to choose for their children is a calumny: Poor parents in the Cleveland and Milwaukee voucher programs have flocked to reputable schools and shunned upstart and fringe schools).

Democrats should stop wrapping the current arrangements in the flag of public education – and stop opposing reforms just because some Republicans like them.

Preventing harm to children who stay behind as others depart for new schools requires an immediate change in where decisions about public school spending are made. Today, public schools in all but the tiniest school systems can't adapt to changing enrollment because they have no money and no control over hiring and firing. Teachers and other resources are chosen for them at the central office, and when cuts are necessary they reflect school board politics, not school needs. It is no wonder that teachers and principals in troubled schools become discouraged in the face of competition from charters and contract schools.

Public school leaders must be given the flexibility to adapt to changing enrollments and to compete for students. Making teachers' and principals' schools — and jobs — dependent on their performance will do more than anything to give disadvantaged children more opportunities. It will also start the transition toward an all-charters or contract system, where every school controls critical resources, competes for students, and demonstrates performance.

How to Start

The first step is for Democrats to stop letting the public education establishment wrap the current arrangements in the flag of public education — and to stop opposing school reform ideas just because some Republicans like them. Democrats at all levels, including those in the cities, must work to improve education for all children, not to preserve historical accidents that do not work.

The second step is for Democrats to allow widespread experimentation with school contracting, including charter programs that have no caps on the numbers of participating schools and that truly give schools the autonomy they need to be effective. States and localities should be committed to expanding these experiments if they work, and Democrats should also make sure all publicly funded schools get control of real dollars and can hire the best teachers available. Teachers unions can live with such a system if they know there is no alternative.

Finally, Democrats must support a serious dialogue about standards: Do we know which skills children must have in order to become full citizens in our boisterous, competitive, fast-moving, and technology-driven society? Which skills sound important but are not demonstrably needed? How do we avoid loading schools down with standards that have no real warrant except that some interest group has pressed for them?

Well-grounded standards can help propel education reform. The national government can accelerate the development of such standards by investing in R&D and requiring states to use standards-based tests to assess learning gains in schools receiving federal program funds.[1]

However, we need to recognize the limits of standards. Without the other initiatives outlined above, standards will not give us good public schools. Moreover, standards defined via political bargaining among groups devoted to particular disciplines and subject matters can only perpetuate our confusion about what public education is and what it must accomplish.

[1] *For a complete explanation of this idea see Hill, Paul T., "Schools, Government, and the Federal Role in Education," in Diane Ravitch Ed., Brookings Papers in Education Policy 2000, Washington, The Brookings Press (forthcoming December 1999).*

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Peter Hutchinson is president of the Public Strategies Group, Inc., a St. Paul, Minnesota-based consulting company dedicated to improved performance by our public organizations. David Osborne and Bob Stone are among PSG's partners. From 1993-1997 PSG served as Superintendent of the Minneapolis Public Schools.

Louise Sundin is president of the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers, vice president of the American Federation of Teachers, a founding member of the Teacher Union Reform Network, and president of Dial-a-Teacher, Inc., Homework Hotline, and Homework On-Line.

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High student performance requires that we redesign how we recruit, develop and reward better teachers. In Minneapolis, working with the union, we did.

The best teaching candidates are the students in our classrooms for 13 years. No other profession has such immediate access to potential recruits.

Grow your own teachers

by Peter Hutchinson and Louise Sundin

BY THE TIME you finished high school you had been inspired, instructed, nurtured, ignored, challenged, guided, bored, and coerced by 80 to 100 different teachers. You can instantly remember the teachers who had the most impact on you. The math teacher who unlocked the secrets of algebra. The English teacher who inspired you to love your own language and books of your own choice. The fourth grade teacher who gave you special encouragement just when you needed it. Or the coach that pushed you beyond your own expectations. We can all name great teachers we had. They were the exception.

According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, "What teachers know and can do is one of the most important influences on what students learn." The commission found that the quality of teaching explained more of the differences in student achievement than any other school-related factor and nearly as much as home and family. If we want better student achievement, we must have better teaching. And if we want great teaching — or even good teaching — we need to redesign the systems that recruit, develop, support, reward, and retain it.

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Opportunities to contribute more in the classroom and for leadership are all important to teachers. But money does matter.

The strategies for improving teacher quality outlined in this article stem from our experience in the Minneapolis school system. The Public Strategies Group (of which Peter Hutchinson is president) was the first company in the nation with responsibility for leading a large urban public school district. Our contract was performance-based and our pay was tied to achieving specific goals, including improved student achievement. PSG's most important partner was the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers (of which Louise Sundin is president). Together, we understood the critical role of good teaching in student success and committed ourselves to improving results in the classroom. We did so by developing a model of an effective teaching professional and using it as a basis for improving the practice of teaching throughout our schools.

Recruitment — Grow Your Own

Schools are facing a demographic double whammy. Enrollments are rising just as teacher retirements are beginning to accelerate. More troublesome is the fact that up to one-third of teachers leave teaching within their first few years. As a result, 200,000 teachers will need to be hired each year through 2007 (1.8 million in all) to ensure that we have the 3.34 million we will need at that time.

Our communities are filled with people for whom teaching would be a better use of their college degrees, work experiences, and talents.

Where will we find the best possible teaching recruits? The best candidates are already in our classrooms. They are our students for 13 years. No other profession has such immediate access to potential recruits and manages to ignore and waste it. We call our strategy, based on this built-in advantage, the "grow your own." It has three parts. First, open teaching magnet high schools to encourage promising students to pursue teaching as a career. Give them a chance early on to experience the rewards of teaching. If a full magnet high school is not possible, then create student internships or tutoring opportunities designed to encourage careers in teaching.

Second, offer college scholarships, internships, and even part time jobs to support candidates in college who commit to teach. This should include classroom aides and paraprofessionals who have already made a commitment to children and the classroom, but have not yet completed their degree. The U.S. government could help by forgiving all or a portion of federally subsidized loans for those who teach.

Third, grow your own by providing alternative pathways into teaching. Our communities are filled with people for whom teaching would be a better use of their college degrees, work experiences, and talents than their current career or the prospect of early retirement. They want to give back to their communities. We can equip these people to succeed in today's classrooms without requiring them to go back to college and start over. Post-secondary institutions can partner with K-12 schools to design a curriculum for these older, more experienced students that is tied to the real world of teaching. K-12 schools can accelerate and intensify teacher preparation with hands-on classroom experiences. The prospect of employment and financial support during the transition will make this "grow your own by transplanting" strategy more effective.

Development — Making Good Teaching Count

In most places, teachers are isolated from colleagues and get little professional feedback. They are time-starved in a world of rising expectations, in classrooms that are more diverse and demanding, and in a society with

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Corps values/william A. Galston

In the next decade, we must replace an entire generation of teachers. A national teacher corps is one way for kids — especially those who need it most — to get good ones.

Educational research is finally confirming what parents have known for a long time: teachers matter — a lot. In a recent Tennessee study, for example, fifth-graders who had three high-ranked math teachers in a row outscored by more than 50 points similar students who had three consecutive low-ranked teachers. That's the difference between scoring in the 29th percentile of all test takers and the 83rd! Unfortunately, poor and minority students are far less likely than others to be assigned high-ranking teachers, increasing educational inequality.

In the next decade, as we replace an entire generation of teachers, we face two great challenges: first, to increase the share of talented young people who choose teaching as a profession; and second, to make sure that all our children have a fair chance to get good teachers — especially those children who stand to lose the most if they don't.

We're never going to be able to make teachers' salaries fully competitive with those on Wall Street or in major law firms. But we can make strategic use of well-timed incentives to increase the supply of high-quality entering teachers. One way is to create a National Teachers Corps. Here's how it would work:

High school seniors in the upper portion of their graduating class (at least the upper quarter, perhaps only the top 10 percent) would be offered scholarships of up to $5,000 per year — funded by the federal government — for four years to help pay for college. In return, they would make a four-year commitment to public school teaching. Before they started teaching, they would have to pass demanding tests demonstrating subject-matter mastery as well as pedagogical skills. In addition, they would agree to teach in high-need areas, as measured by indicators such as poverty and sub-par academic achievement.

High school seniors with good grades would be offered substantial college scholarships. In return, they would make a four-year commitment to public school teaching.

This proposal draws on programs as diverse as AmeriCorps, the ROTC, and Teach for America. One key principle is that many talented young people are idealistic and drawn to meaningful challenges. Another is that the feasible level of material incentives will achieve the greatest leverage if offered at the end of high school, when many families are struggling to finance a college education for their graduates.

There's another promising strategy combining idealism and the desire for a challenge with concrete rewards: Let's make it more attractive to teach students who begin at low achievement levels. How? School systems should be encouraged to experiment with salary incentives that key a portion of teachers' pay not to absolute levels of achievement, but to students' academic progress. Here's one version:

At the beginning of each year, teachers in a school district could be given a choice between the current fixed pay schedule and a plan with a lower guaranteed salary but large bonuses if their students showed significant academic improvement. Under this approach, classes that started out low would offer the greatest potential for large gains. Classes would be tested at the beginning of the year and again at the end. Moving a class from (say) the 20th to the 50th percentile between September and June would be worth a larger bonus than lifting a class from the 75th to the 85th. Teachers would be responsible, and rewarded, for the value they added during the academic year, not for their students' prior academic difficulties.

At present, the most talented teachers tend to shy away from low-achieving classes. Even with a value-added approach, no doubt many still would. But some — among the most ambitious and self-confident — would seize the chance to improve their own lives while improving the prospects of long-neglected students.

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School Kelso Elementary/Inglewood, Calif.

limitless access to information. The traditional role of the teacher as the "sage on the stage" is outdated. Our best recruiting efforts will fail to produce good teaching unless K-12 schools embrace what we know works — continual quality improvement based on demonstrated competence. Again, there are three parts to making this happen.

First, teacher licensure should be competency-based. Under this system, teachers progress from a student or practice teaching license, through intern or resident status, to a professional license, then to lead teacher or mentor status, and ultimately to national certification (by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.) At each step, teachers are expected to demonstrate their competencies with a portfolio of their work, a series of in-class observations, action research, teaching demonstrations, and testing. Teachers are required to renew their license every five to seven years.

Second, schools need to support every teacher with a continual improvement coaching team. Every teacher, no matter how long or how successfully they have been teaching, can improve. Few actors work without directors honing their skills on stage. No great athlete competes without a coach. Yet, for most of our history we have provided teachers either with no coaching or with the illusion that the principal would handle it. While principals need to be part of the coaching team, they are so overwhelmed themselves that we cannot count on them exclusively. Turn, instead, to peers — to the teachers themselves.

Every teacher's professional development plan, developed with a coaching team (two to three peers plus the principal), can be based on information collected from classroom observations and test scores as well as parent and student feedback. The plan lays out areas for improvement, action steps, measures of success based on standards of effective instruction, and a schedule for periodic review. The coaching team recognizes and rewards teacher success, provides support and assistance to improve performance, directs teacher action or even intervenes if improvement is not forthcoming, and recommends

Located smack under the noisy landing path of Los Angeles International Airport, Kelso Elementary School in Inglewood, Calif., serves a largely poor population of African Americans and Latinos. Yet for more than a decade, its reading scores have exceeded state averages, putting it on a par with such affluent suburban California districts as Manhattan Beach and Torrance.

Kelso Principal Marjorie Thompson attributes her school's eye-catching success rates to the Open Court program, a phonics-and-literature approach with tightly scripted lesson plans. She credits the emphasis on phonetics with putting some of her first- and second-grade students in the 60th to 80th percentiles. Even first graders who enter school unable to recite the alphabet or hold a pencil are reading and writing by spring. In addition, the students' performance is bolstered by an in-house reading coach who observes and refines teachers' methods. "The coach works with novice teachers to hone their skills," says vice principal Chi Kim. "Because we have high teacher turnover in this area, the coach is absolutely crucial in implementing Open Court."

Kelso also offers reading intervention programs. Its kindergarten-age English language learners (students who do not speak English at home) have an extended day for an extra hour's enrichment. And, as a year-around school, Kelso also offers inter-session courses focused on reading.

Based in part on the Los Angeles Times, *May 4, 1996 and December 20, 1998*

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Judy Kranzler Innovator

Kranzler, a former student of Marcel Marceau, pioneered a new way to teach reading.

As a child, Judy Kranzler struggled with reading, and she dropped out of high school after her junior year. The breakthrough came when she moved to France at 18 and quickly picked up the language. She realized then that she was a "kinesthetic" or hands-on learner. She has spent the last 26 years developing an approach to teach reading with a strong kinesthetic component. Today she trains schoolteachers in her technique and has a licensed nonprofit reading clinic in Walnut Creek, Calif.

I often jokingly say that there is not as much dyslexia as there is dysteachia. If I am teaching a Japanese child and I don't speak Japanese, I am putting that child at a disadvantage. I need to understand the pathways to that child's knowledge center.

The two traditional methods used to convey information in American schools are visual and auditory. Most people, approximately 65 percent, are visual learners who have something like a little camera that captures information and shines it up on a mental screen. Auditory learners, about 25 percent of the population, have a mental tape recorder.

These two methods leave out the kinesthetic learners, the 10 percent of the population that learns hands-on, physically. Traditional teaching also often leaves out spatial, interactive, and musical learners. Of the kinesthetic learners, over 90 percent drop out.

Kinesthetic kids need physical cues that help them connect word sounds and anchor those sounds in their brains. When I was in France, I studied mime with Marcel Marceau. From this training, I developed hand movements that are used in our reading program. In France, they use this kinesthetic approach as one of their main ways of teaching French sounds. I have developed movements for English sounds and have improved on that technique by designing them to blend together to sound out and spell words.

We've seen the difference it makes for that kid whose head was on his desk, who was bored out of his skull by the sit-look-listen approach, or who was bouncing off the walls. If you put on a rap beat or you put a ball in his hand as he's practicing word sounds, you see him wake up, pay attention, focus.

Many kids are misdiagnosed with ADD and prescribed Ritalin when in fact they are just kinesthetic learners. We get kids at our reading clinics who were diagnosed ADD, yet within three months they're reading. They gain a skill that makes them feel a part of the classroom learning process and actually alleviates their frustration, therefore calming them down. The most frequent question from the adults, teen-agers, and young kids we work with is "how come no one ever showed me this before?"

By the time a child gets to second or third grade, we should know what his or her combination of learning strengths are and be teaching all subjects to those strengths.

My son and daughter are good examples. My son is a very kinesthetic, spatial, interactive and auditory learner. He takes longer to study than my daughter, who is a visual learner. But my son has done very well. When he was given a poem to memorize by the next day, he felt comfortable telling the teacher that he needed two days so that he could walk it, talk it, and learn it physically. And the teacher gave him the extra day.

He is going to Johns Hopkins next year. And he is giving the graduation speech this year. He, like all kinesthetic learners, can relate to the Native American saying, "Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I will remember. Involve me and I will understand."

—Interview by Marilyn Snell

Kinesthetic kids need physical cues that help them connect word sounds and anchor those sounds in their brains. Traditional methods leave out the kinesthetic learners, and over 90 percent of them drop out.

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We designed a process that provides support to every teacher — but also assures that those who should not be teaching don't.

outplacement or a new career if poor performance and inaction to correct it persist. Such a process both provides support to every teacher and helps ensure that those who should not be teaching don't continue.

Third, make professional development performance-based. Currently, schools pay for professional development through the budget directly and, more importantly, through the teacher's contract. Professional development budgets are generally miniscule (under 2 percent) and are often doled out to individual schools or teachers to use as they see fit. The cost of professional development through the teacher's contract dwarfs the line item budget by a factor of five to one. The typical contract has a series of pay ranges, often called "lanes," that compensate teachers for the degree they hold or the number of credits they have obtained toward a degree. In essence, the contract encourages teachers to continually obtain credits, rather than to achieve results in the classroom.

We can start to make professional development performance-based by making the income of those who train teachers (including internal district staff) contingent on the successful application of techniques and knowledge in the classroom with real students. This could be ascertained through some combination of observation, surveys, or tests. The "lanes" in the contract should also be competency-based. In these ways, we can make good teaching count and better teaching count more.

Keeping the Best — Make it Rewarding

After we have grown our own, and committed ourselves to continually improving, we need to ensure that we keep the best. We frequently lose good teachers who quit early or go into administration.

One way to retain good teachers is to create a professional ladder for teaching and a role for teachers in leading their profession. Recognize and reward master teachers. Make them teacher leaders with responsibility for improving the quality of teaching throughout the organization. These teacher mentors can be among our most valuable resources.

We also need to reward good teaching. The average salary for a teacher is $39,000. Obviously, it isn't only money that matters to teachers. Opportunities for professional development, for contributing more in the classroom and for teacher leadership are all important. But money does matter. In addition to long-term rewards tied to competence, teachers should be rewarded for their "value added" in the classroom. While every teacher is expected to add a year's worth of learning to the growth of every child they have for a year, teachers who do better than that should be recognized and rewarded. Likewise, whole schools can be rewarded when they provide their students with more than a year's worth of learning in one school year.

Need evidence?

In Minneapolis, we pursued all of the strategies identified here and more. We began growing our own teachers through a magnet school and several alternative pathways. We implemented team coaching for teachers through a Professional Development Process (PDP). We used the PDP to improve teaching in most cases and to move people out of teaching in those few but significant cases when improvement no longer seemed possible. We created a teacher's contract that institutionalized the PDP and recognized National Board Certification as a basis for compensation. We also calculated the "value added" in our schools and rewarded those schools (though not individual teachers) that added the most.

The results have been dramatic. In 1998 our students made the largest gains this decade on nationally standardized tests. We've seen a 50 percent increase over the last four years in the percentage of students passing the state's graduation test in reading. All is not perfect. Scores and achievement must be higher still, much higher; especially for African-American and Latino children, children in poverty and children without a permanent home. Nevertheless, there is little doubt in the Minneapolis Public School system that improving student achievement through improved teaching is the key to success.

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Teachers, teachers, teachers!/William Sanders

A Tennessee statistician is gaining acclaim — and drawing fire — for his studies showing that a good teacher is more important than a good neighborhood.

William L. Sanders is a professor and director of the Value-Added Research and Assessment Center at University of Tennessee. He developed the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System — the largest longitudinal merged database of student achievement data in the country. Sanders' claim that teacher effectiveness dwarfs all other factors — including previous achievement levels and socio-economic influences — as a predictor of student academic growth has challenged decades of dogma and generated national controversy. The following comments were adapted from interviews with Sanders and one of his speeches.

The most controversial part of our work has been this finding: the overwhelming importance of the classroom teacher in determining academic growth.

By measuring what I call the dimples and bubbles in each kid's own pathway — mathematically and simultaneously — we've been able to get a very fair measure of the school district, the school, and the individual classroom. And we've been able to demonstrate that ethnicity, poverty, and affluence can no longer be used as justifications for the failure to make academic progress.

The single biggest factor affecting academic growth of any population of youngsters is the effectiveness of the individual classroom teacher.

The answer to why children learn well or not isn't race, it isn't poverty, it isn't even per-pupil expenditure at the elementary level. It's teachers, teachers, teachers.

The teacher's effect on academic growth dwarfs and nearly renders trivial all these other factors that people have historically worried about.

The second point that surprises some people is that it is not our lowest-achieving children whom our system serves worst. It's our early high achievers among minorities.

In Tennessee, for instance, the children who are getting hammered the hardest are the early high-achieving African American children. They do well in the early grades but decline in later grades. This comes from their higher likelihood of being in a succession of classrooms where the instruction is geared to lower achievers. Any children who have a likelihood of being in such an environment will experience what I call a shed pattern: declining like the roof of a country shed.

The same thing happens in affluent suburbs where a sincere, conscientious teacher focuses on the two or three poor students and holds back the rest of the class, making the above-average children more vulnerable. But it disproportionately affects disadvantaged minorities.

The other big issue is the debate over standards. I'm all for standards, but I propose looking at them in terms of the rate of academic growth instead of absolute cut-scores for each grade level.

It's not realistic to expect disadvantaged populations to score at the same level as suburban children in the early grades. What's important is not where children are in third grade, but in grades 11 and 12.

I prefer to view the academic process as a ramp instead of stair steps. That way it doesn't matter where the children are on the ramp as long as they reach the top by the end of their schooling.

Expecting all children to take the same steps every year is not realistic. If the height between two steps is too great, a high percentage of children will fail. If too low, the high achievers will be bored. But with a ramp, you accept the fact that children will be at different spots on the ramp, but moving up. The point is to have sustained academic growth for all children, no matter what their starting point.

Of course, those who start low need a faster growth rate. They need to grow at 110 percent or 120 percent. That is, they need to achieve 1.1 or 1.2 years of growth each year. We find that the top 20 percent of teachers are helping kids do that. They know how to teach children who are at three different levels on the ramp within the same classroom. We find inner city and rural schools that are doing a magnificent job. They're on the ramp at 120 percent.

In short, what's important is the academic progress that each child makes each year, not his absolute score. The child should be compared to himself, his previous performance, not to all of his peers. That's what we ought to be holding school systems, schools, and teachers accountable for.

Thanks to Steve Rees, www.schoolwisepress.com, for assistance with this article.

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Subject matters

by James Traub

In "Standards for Our Schools," Judy Codding describes the workings of Pasadena High School when she arrived there as principal in 1988. Bad enough was the fact that half the students were getting D's and F's in their core subjects; what was almost more frightening was that the few successful students were being passed from algebra to geometry all the way to Advanced Placement Calculus without ever moving much beyond basic arithmetic. When Codding asked her feeder middle schools to administer competency tests to eighth-graders in math, they were outraged, she writes; hadn't the kids already demonstrated competency by passing their classes? When she finally prevailed, she writes, "Our worst nightmare had become a reality: Only two entering students" — rather than 180 — "were prepared to take high school-level math." And then when Codding tried to drastically change her own school's curriculum to focus on real math achievement, both parents and teachers rebelled, since she was cutting into time reserved for vocational education and, even worse, for the school's treasured sports program.

The most appalling thing about Codding's tale is the indifference she encountered: parents, students, teachers, and administrators had learned to live with failure or with the mere appearance of achievement. The poor kids were flunking out, but at least they had

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James Traub is a contributing writer for The New York Times Magazine. *He is currently writing a guide to school-wide reform models for the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.*

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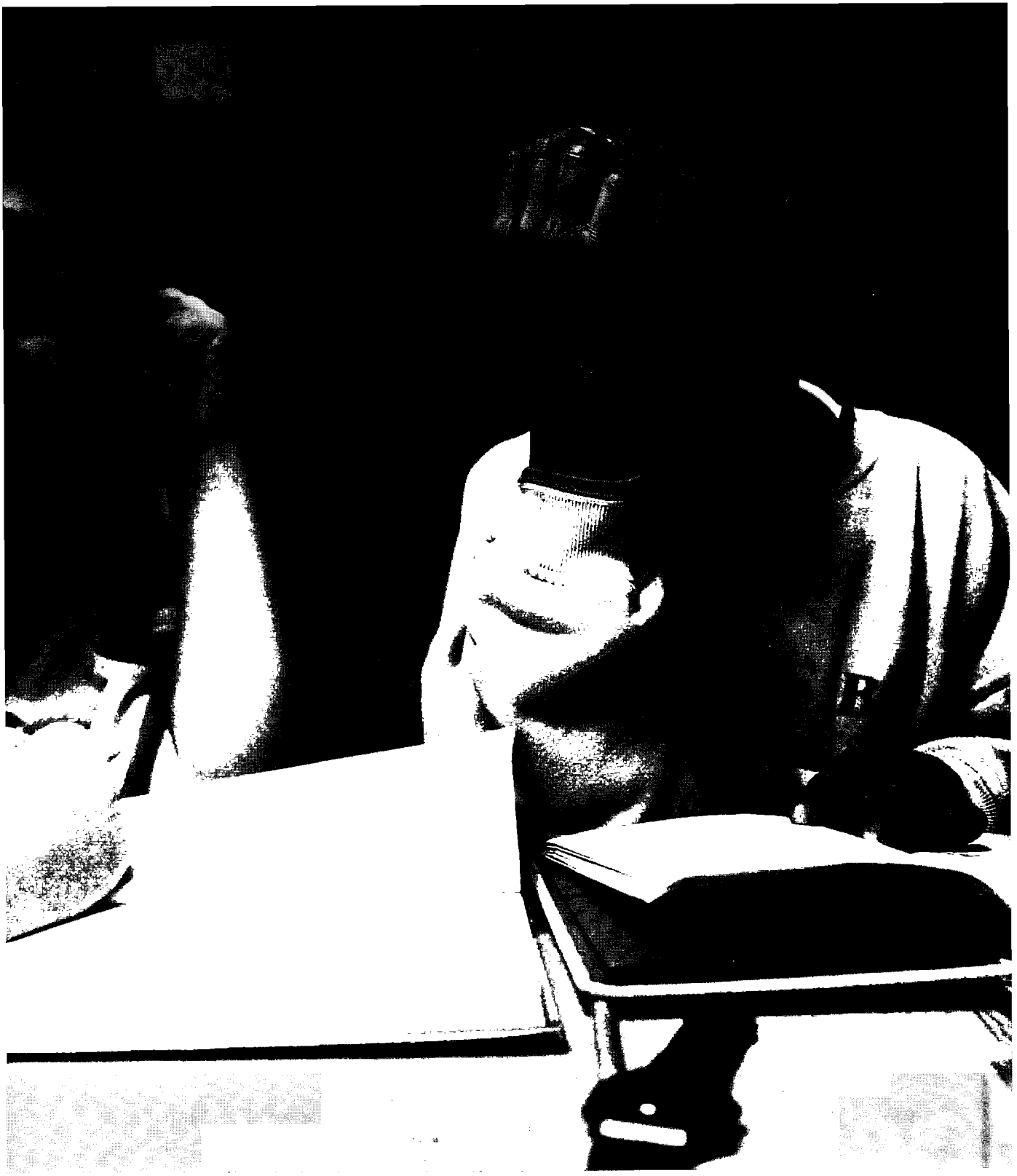

There's a lot of truth to the traditionalists' view that the schools started downhill when we lost faith in the core curriculum and in the pedagogical standbys, like phonics.

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School Morse School, Cambridge, Mass.

The Morse School, located at the edge of the Charles River, has never been the school of choice for Harvard professors: Half of the 289 students qualify for Title I aid; about a quarter of the students are African American, a quarter are Asian, and 7 percent are Hispanic; a third take English as a Second Language. In the early 1990s, rumor had it that Morse was going to be shuttered. The school typically finished in the middle of the pack on test scores, and outside of a lovely building in a charming location, had very little to offer the immigrant and working-class parents who sent their children there.

Then one of the parents suggested that the school take a look at the new Core Knowledge program, which had first been tried in a school in Florida in 1991. "The superintendent's curriculum people were totally opposed," says Morse Principal Jim Coady. "They told us the Core Knowledge curriculum was racist, Eurocentric, homophobic."

Nevertheless, Coady won the right to conduct his experiment, and the school began implementing the Core Knowledge design in the 1992-1993 school year. Scores began to rise a few years later. Last year, all grades scored at or above the national norm in reading and math. The first-graders placed third in the city in reading, behind two upper-income schools.

As word of its achievements has spread, Morse has begun to attract middle-class students. One parent took her two daughters out of exclusive private schools and put them into Morse, and she has been delighted with the results. So have her daughters.

—James Traub

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voc ed and football. The middle-class kids in the AP classes had barely learned a thing, but they were going to graduate and go on to college. The system "worked" by its own minimal standards, and so reacted to challenges with righteous indignation.

The plight of Pasadena High School reminds us, first, that national prosperity has blinded us to widespread academic failure, and second, that we have two quite distinct species of failure — the problem of illiteracy and high dropout rates which plagues inner-city children, and the problem of mass mediocrity which applies largely to the middle-class. The twin problems are inscribed in test scores. According the most recent NAEP, the average reading score of fourth graders poor enough to qualify for a free or reduced lunch was well below the level considered "basic." Non-poor students averaged above "basic" but below "proficient." A grand total of seven percent of fourth-graders read at an "advanced" level.

What explains the crisis of illiteracy and failure? In no other industrialized nation do the schools have to contend with the varieties of suffering and disability that little children in Bed-Stuy or East L.A. bring with them to school. We ask the schools to fill the void created by the collapse of every other institution; that is too much to expect. The schools throw up their hands, and make do with "business math" and the machine shop. Or they content themselves with tiny achievements. I recently visited a school in Memphis where the teachers were delighted when the children wrote a sentence or two; then, after instituting a new reading and writing program, they were amazed to find that the kids could be pushed to write a paragraph.

And what explains the phenomenon of mass mediocrity? There's some truth to the traditionalists' view that the schools started downhill when we lost faith in the core curriculum and in the pedagogical standbys, like phonics. And yet Americans have always managed to devise substitutes for and distractions from the academic curriculum taken for granted elsewhere in the world — Deweyan "child-centered education," voc ed and football, the "general" track, sex education and character education and drug awareness and conflict resolution and so on. We have never held intellectualism in high esteem, and we became the world's most powerful nation without ever becoming the world's best educated.

There is evidence, however, that we have begun to recognize that this state of affairs can't last. The publication in 1983 of "A Nation At Risk," with its apocalyptic language, brought new urgency to a debate that often had more to do with politics and money than with learning. Parents now appear to understand that their children need intellectual skills to succeed economically; polls show that voters consider education the most important issue. States are vying with one another to establish standards. Even those dismal scores on the NAEP represent progress from 1994. And Judy Codding's story has a happy ending. She insisted that her students take real math, and, lo and behold, their grades on a standardized math test went from the lowest to the highest in the district. The teachers, she writes, "became the biggest advocates for high expectations for all students once they saw for themselves what these students could achieve." Failure isn't inevitable; it's just that the force of convention is extremely powerful.

One may think of education reform in terms of Archimedes' boast about moving the earth. You need the right lever and the right place to stand. One obvious place is Washington. Congress will soon be conducting a pitched battle over the renewal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which provides $21 billion to schools. Some very important issues about the role of the federal government in education hang in the balance; but it's also true that the overwhelming portion of education funds come from state and local government.

Washington might be a better place to stand if it were wielding a different lever. Many of the countries that cream us in international comparisons, including Britain, France, and Japan, have a national curriculum, in which students learn an extensive, coherent body of material and prove their mastery through performance on a national battery of tests. Others have exacting national standards.

Many of the countries that cream us on international comparisons have an extensive and coherent national curriculum and a national battery of tests.

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The tradition of localism probably makes a national curriculum impossible in this country, but national standards may prove less of a stretch. President Bush was early proponent of such a system, and later President Clinton made the proposal a centerpiece of his education agenda. The idea has encountered stiff opposition, mostly from conservatives who oppose any federal role in education, but the growing concern over educational failure may trump localism and anti-federalism.

Right now, the state capitols are clearly a better place to stand than Washington. And here there is a great deal of action. Virtually all states have now published grade-by-grade standards on the principal subjects and have created tests to measure student performance. However, the standards tend to be vague and easy: In what is known as the Lake Wobegone effect, a majority of students test "above average" in almost all states. It is in the vapidity of most state standards that one sees the system's tendency to be satisfied with half-measures and modest achievements; thus the search for the lever stout enough to dislodge schools from their rut. And this, in turn, explains the sudden popularity of market-driven reforms, including charter schools and vouchers.

Advocates of charter schools and vouchers argue that competitive pressures will force schools to improve, and there is growing evidence that the success of charter schools will spur school districts to embrace reform. But if the underlying problem has to do with low standards, low expectations, and intellectual poverty, one should look for solutions that directly affect classroom practice. And here there is some real reason for hope. In the last 10 years or so, thousands of schools have adopted some "schoolwide reform" model, whether the progressive Essential School model associated with Theodore Sizer or the more traditional Core Knowledge program developed by E. D. Hirsch. Several of the models measure student performance according to a wide-ranging and very detailed canon of standards, such as the states themselves have been reluctant to promulgate. Yet another design is based on the Outward Bound program. In some uniquely American experiment in sheer open-mindedness, we have let a hundred flowers bloom, and a thousand schools contend. And the experiment has been institutionalized in the form of New American Schools, a private, nonprofit corporation that in 1991 invited proposals for "break-the-mold" schools and is now, with the help of $150 million in federal funds, encouraging the development of seven distinct school models.

The act of subjecting schools to sweeping, consistent change seems to make some difference almost independent of content. A study of 25 schools in Memphis that had adopted models from New American Schools found that students in second through fifth grade significantly outperformed students in demographically similar schools on statewide tests; the students in the reformed schools had trailed the others just two years earlier, prior to the changes. But some designs are far more effective than others. A study of 24 models—which is to say, pretty much all of them—found that only three demonstrated "strong evidence of positive effects on student achievement." Two of them, Success For All and Direct Instruction, involve highly scripted routines designed to ensure that all children learn to read; the third, High Schools That Work, offers a kind of throwback school in which all students take a rigorous academic schedule. Strikingly, only two or three of the many progressive models, with an "integrated curriculum" and "student-centered learning," showed even "promising evidence" on student achievement.

One of the experiment's implications is that the problem of failure may require a different solution than the problem of mediocrity. Success For All and Direct Instruction are pedagogical forms of crisis intervention that have proved appealing to desperate inner-city schools. In the Success For All model, students from different grades are grouped according to reading level; kids who fall behind are pulled out for one-on-one tutoring. Teachers read a script, and children respond in unison, as in Chinese re-education camp. It's not pretty. At P.S. 159, in a horrendous neighborhood in Brooklyn, Carolyn Skolnick, a teacher of first- and second-graders, holds up a card

In the Success For All model, teachers read a script, and children respond in unison, as in Chinese re-education camp. It's not pretty, but seems to work.

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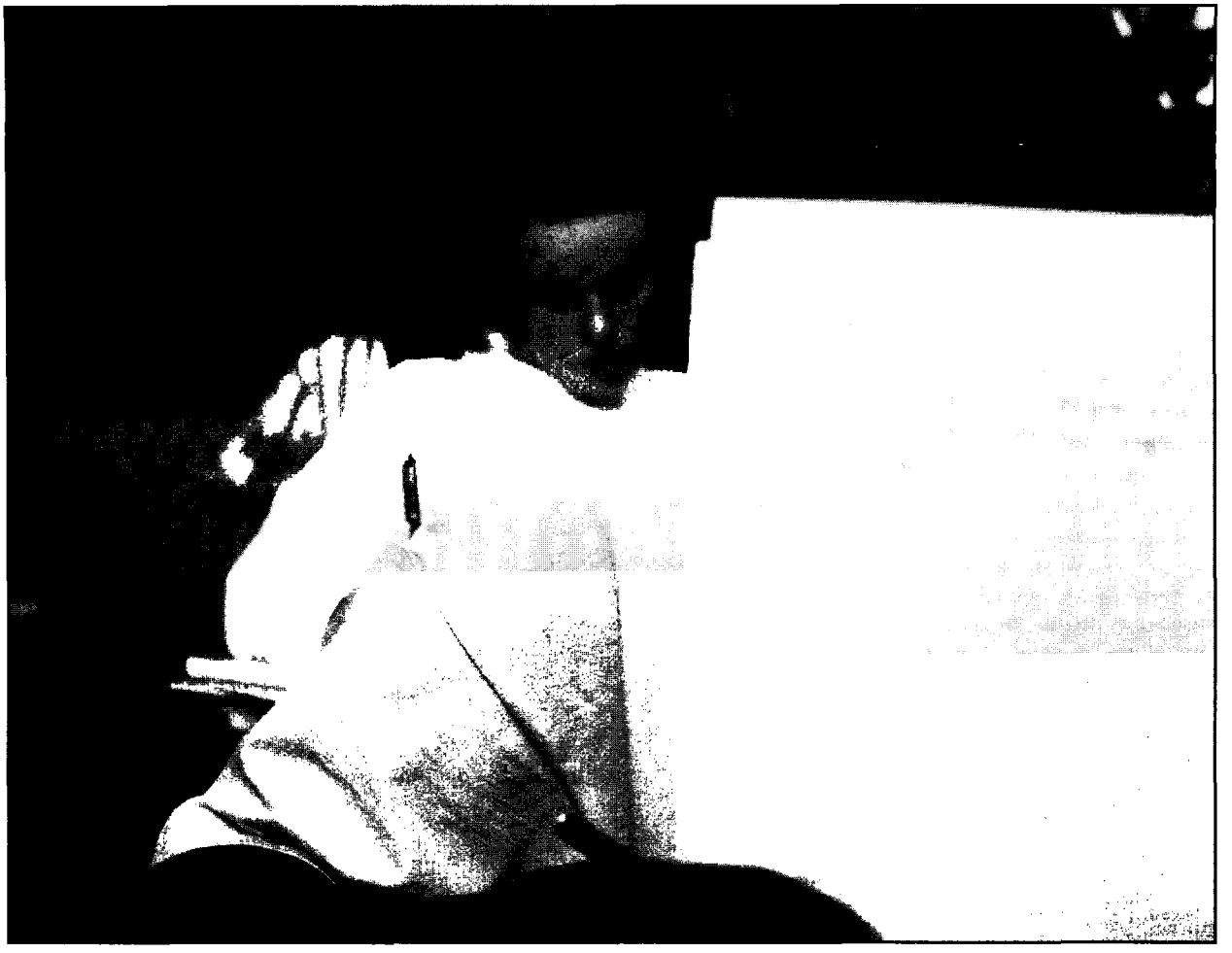

The need to know test/Michelle Tolbert

National testing will let parents know how their child stacks up

Parents and educators lack fundamental information about their children's academic performance; they simply have no means of gauging how their children compare to other children throughout the nation. If we are serious about improving education for all children, we must give parents and educators the tools to accurately assess their children's progress.

Currently, there is no clarity or consensus on standards of achievement. For example, the single continuing source of national and state-comparable information on student achievement, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), only tests a cross section of our nation's children and does not provide individual scores. In addition, there are gross discrepancies between state standards and NAEP.

The fact is, our nation's education system is very confusing. With states setting divergent standards, different sources training teachers, and commercial publishers producing the tests, students, parents, and teachers are left with no clear direction. And, to make matters worse, legislators and school administrators who are creating and implementing education reforms are doing so with insufficient information.

What's the solution? National standards and assessment. We must form a consensus on what students need to know. While the means by which students reach the national standard should be left up to the state and locality, the ends should not vary from state to state. All students, regardless of where they live, should be held to the same high standard of learning.

That is exactly the proposal President Clinton urged, but saw defeated by Republicans, in 1997. He called for national standards, starting with fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math, and for states to participate in voluntary examinations of those standards.

As President Clinton pointed out, national testing will give parents a clear understanding of how their child compares to other children at the same grade level. It will also expose the strengths and weaknesses of a school's curriculum and teacher preparation. National testing will stimulate competition among schools as well as promote community involvement. Further, it will provide legislators and school administrators the tools necessary to better direct future reforms.

National standards and assessment should be a positive force in our education system. It should not be used to punish students, schools, or states. Rather, it should serve as a working guide to where improvements are needed in our nations' schools to ensure that all children receive a good education.

Michelle Tolbert is a research assistant at the Progressive Policy Institute.

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School P.S. 154, Harlem, N.Y.

with a big, black "J" and says, "The sound of 'J' is 'juh, juh, juh.'" And the children chant the words back to her. She points to vocabulary words, and the children chant those back, too. They spell "open" with a clap between each letter. The children then read a phonetically controlled story about a skater to one another. Miss Skolnick hands out clipboards, and the children write down the names of the characters, the setting, the "problem" and the "solution" of the story. The principal, Kathy Garibaldi, says, "I still cringe when I hear choral answers," but she believes that the relentless focus on basic skills works.

It's not yet clear whether programs like Success For All and Direct Instruction will move children up the spiral from mere literacy to a deeper fluency with ideas and information. How, in other words, do you move beyond the crisis-intervention model? An alternative and far more prepossessing vision of schooling comes from E.D. Hirsch, who argues that children, especially poor children, arrive at school with a deficit of knowledge, not of skills. Hirsch has constructed a grade-by-grade curriculum that is probably the closest thing in the United States to what children study in much of the industrialized world. Core Knowledge earned a "promising evidence" rating in the whole-school reform survey. Kathleen O'Connell, a teacher at the Morse school in Cambridge, Mass., says, "You'd never think you could teach a first-grader the Mayas, ancient Egypt, the American Revolution — but you'd be amazed." When I sat down with some second-graders at lunch, they were able to tell me who had built the Great Wall of China and why, name several Greek and Hindu gods, and provide a serviceable explanation of gravity. And they were not, by and large, middle-class students. Morse, in fact, was the one high-poverty school in Cambridge that had scored as well as the upper-middle-class schools on statewide exams administered last year.

There are many such signs of life in American schools today. For years, teachers and administrators expected less and less and students faithfully delivered less and less. It seems that the process is now beginning to reverse itself.

Three years ago, P.S. 154 — a nearly all-black elementary school opposite a federal housing project in Harlem — had spent nearly a decade on New York state's list of lowest-performing schools. "The school wasn't dangerous, it was simply dead," says David Sherman, vice-president of the United Federation of Teachers of New York city. Along with 11 other moribund city schools, P.S. 154 was taken over for special treatment by Chancellor Rudy Crew.

What happened next strikes some as near-miraculous. Within two years, P.S. 154 had risen off the low-performing list; within three, it had gone from 19 percent to 50 percent of students scoring at or above grade level in reading tests. It had reached the national average. How did it happen?

"We took a dysfunctional institution and turned it into a structured, directed organization," says Sherman, who negotiated a new staffing plan. Half the teaching staff and the principal were replaced, a special superintendent was hired, and P.S. 154 aggressively implemented the "Success For All" reading program developed at Johns Hopkins University. Its hallmark is a 90-minute reading block that starts every school day; every adult in the school, including the principal, music teacher and gym coach, give reading instruction for an hour-and-a-half. The literature-based curriculum emphasizes phonics, word attack skills, and comprehension. It also includes a major training element by a Success For All Facilitator trained at Johns Hopkins. The program had community and parent support — and it worked. The proof is in the test scores.

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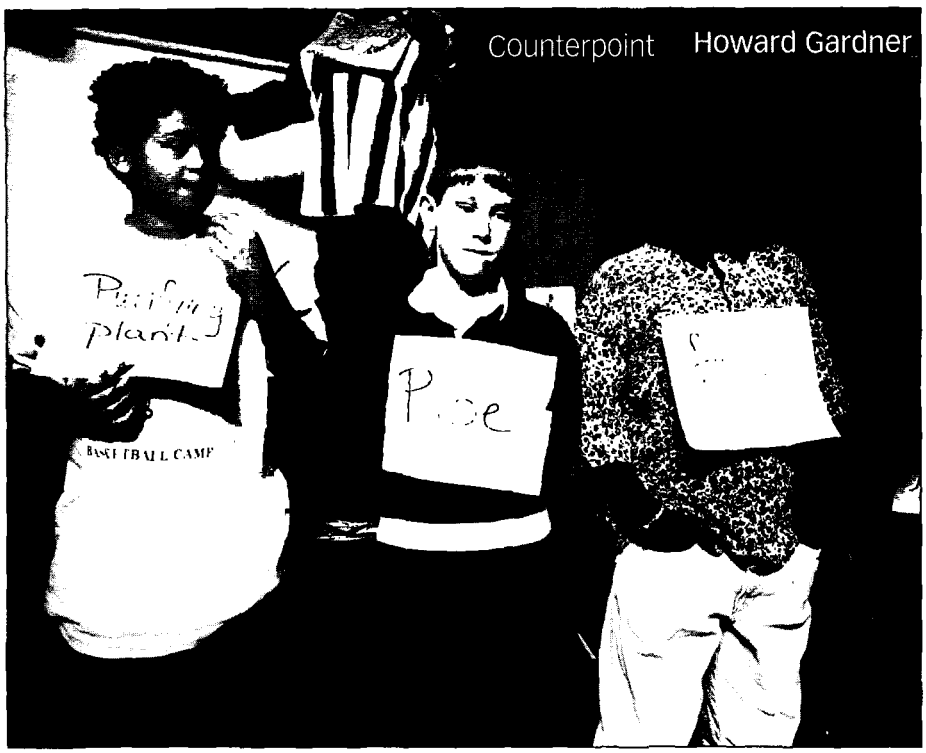

The sweet fruit of understanding

A critic of the core of knowledge approach argues that a disciplined mind is more important

Professor of cognition and education and adjunct professor of psychology at Harvard University, Howard Gardner is the author of many books, including Multiple Intelligences and, most recently, The Disciplined Mind *(1999, Simon & Schuster). He has frequently debated E. D. Hirsch, mentioned in the previous article, on the merits of central-subject learning vs. Hirsch's core-curriculum approach.*

The curse of a "core knowledge-cultural literacy" approach is that you can't possibly achieve genuine understanding. If you skim quickly from one topic to the next, you will have at most a nodding familiarity, which is likely to atrophy. You will not have had time to try out the knowledge, see how it can be used, where it fits, where it does not. When you are willing to spend time on a topic, you can explore it from many angles and really come to understand what it is about. You get to know it from the inside out.

For central subject learning to succeed, it is important that the subject or topic be rich and engaging; the actual identity of the topic is not that important. Once you have tasted the sweet fruit of understanding, you are likely to be motivated to understand many other topics at other times. And if you have never had a genuine understanding of a topic, you will have little impetus to continue learning once you have left school.

In *The Disciplined Mind*, I underscore the importance of being able to understand one's culture's sense of what is true (and what is false), beautiful (ugly), moral (immoral). Every human being has the right to be exposed to the most sophisticated thinking that human beings have evolved, and to apply it to topics and themes of consequence. My own particular choices are the theory of evolution, the music of Mozart, and the Holocaust; but disciplinary understanding can come about as the result of a careful study of an endless number of topics.

Unfortunately, certain contemporary cultural factors mitigate against the development of a disciplined mind. Our culture mentions more topics with more superficiality than any other nation. One villain is the "Vanna White" syndrome, with its mistaken belief that knowledge of individual factoids has much significance. Another is short answer, multiple choice tests, which almost always tap the lowest common denominator of knowledge. In the real world, an individual is not given four choices, one of which is "none of the above." Rather he or she has to decide which information, theories, or frameworks are helpful, and how to apply them.

A disciplined mind is one that has acquired the basic ways of thinking that are associated with major disciplines — in particular, science, history, mathematics, and at least one art form. Ways of thinking presuppose some factual knowledge but go way beyond information; if a person can think scientifically, he or she understands the nature of theory, the making of hypotheses, the collection of evidence relevant to the hypotheses, some way of evaluating data, and the link.

These disciplines are the mental frameworks that allow us to think systematically. In the absence of disciplines, we possess only "inert knowledge," which we cannot use productively. The disciplines are the most precious cognitive gifts we can give to students. Once armed with the disciplines, individuals can learn for the remainder of their lives. Without the disciplines, they are little better than barbarians.

—Interview by Marilyn Snell

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The little things on the way to Littleton

The core issue is the capacity of adults to shape the behavior and culture of youth, especially adolescent males. It runs through history and cuts across cultures.

by George L. Kelling

THE BOYS WHO MASSACRED the Littleton students were at the margins of the margins — that is, they were among the 6 percent of arrested youths who commit 50 percent of all the serious crimes young people perpetrate. Those youth who kill others, whether in suburban areas or in inner-city ghettos, represent a small proportion of these "six percenters." The havoc they wreak, however, affects every aspect of our culture: where we live, especially the elderly; when and where we worship; how we get to jobs; how and where our children play; and how and where we shop. Schools in inner cities, just to highlight one instance, have been turned into fortresses. The Littleton massacre raises the issue of whether suburban schools are, or should be, going in the same direction.

What is making this generation of youth so violent? Answers and associated prescriptions for change are rife: guns, technology, competitive stress, high school culture, television and movie violence, two-income families, poverty and/or welfare (certainly not associated with Littleton), erosion of family values, and so on. All have some degree of credence.

However, the core issue is adults' capacity to shape the behavior and culture of youth, especially adolescent males. This is not just a contemporary problem in the United States. It runs throughout history and cuts across cultures.

Young people have established a culture that is largely independent of adults. Technology was pivotal. In another generation, the automobile allowed young people to move out of the purview of their parents, kin, and neighbors. Later, radio, films, television, and computer games depicted worlds, including violent ones, to youths that they could hardly imagine previously. Now, the Internet extends their range, allowing youth to collect data heretofore hard to obtain — from pornography to bomb-making instructions — free from adult surveillance. Other macro movements, such as suburbanization and the feminist revolution, also changed the

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relationship between adults and youths. In most cases, there is no turning back. Cars and the Internet are here to stay, as are changes in women's roles. Society, more or less smoothly, will adapt to and incorporate the cultural consequences of such change.

But other things have changed too. Whether intentionally or not, social and legal policies have substantially weakened the two institutions most responsible for shaping youth and their culture — the family and schools. Two brief examples follow: Each has to do with controlling youth; each is an instance of "protecting" young people from the "arbitrariness" of adults; and each had a similar outcome.

The first has to do with the juvenile court — an area with which I am familiar because early in my career I was a probation officer. During the 1960s and 1970s, court decisions and subsequent legislation gave rise to two major changes.

First, minor offenses such as running away and drinking became "status" offenses and went largely unpunished. The threshold at which juvenile offenses had any serious consequences was elevated. Property crimes, such as burglary and stealing, became the new "minor offenses" — a classic example of what Sen. Patrick Moynihan aptly called "defining deviance down."

Second, the court shifted from operating "in the welfare of" youths to an adult-like adversarial process. Defense attorneys usurped parental authority. For example, suppose my son were caught stealing a car. His decision about how to plea would be made with his lawyer, who almost certainly would plea bargain or plead my son innocent. If I wanted my son to accept responsibility for his theft, I would have no standing in the matter. If I wouldn't hire him an attorney, the court would appoint one.

The second example concerns schools. Court decisions during the 1960s and 1970s expanded student rights and limited teachers' and principals' disciplinary authority. The decisions did not increase students' rights greatly, as supporters of such decisions point out, but they undermined teachers' confidence that they could maintain order. Routine disciplinary actions, many over relatively trivial matters, now had to meet standards of due process — not always because courts required it but out

Youth culture is now largely independent of adults. Technology was pivotal. The automobile allowed young people to move out of the purview of their parents, kin, and neighbors. Later, radio, films, television, and computer games depicted worlds — including violent ones — that they could hardly imagine previously. Now, the Internet allows them to collect everything from pornography to bomb-making instructions, free from adult surveillance. And in most cases, there is no turning back.

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Most youths don't steal cars, swear at teachers, intimidate others, or vandalize property. But for the "six percenters" who commit the most crimes, and for those six percenters at the margins who are prepared to commit mayhem, the message — that virtually anything goes, short of violence — is disastrous. They catapult forward from incivilities to stealing and burglary, to violence, not only creating enormous damage in the process, but ultimately setting themselves up for draconian punishment and even death.

of fear of litigation. So, "why bother" was not an unreasonable response of school personnel — especially to minor infractions. And so in school, like in the juvenile court, minor offenses are ignored.

Most youths have handled such changes with equanimity. They don't steal cars, swear at teachers, intimidate others, or vandalize property. (Or at least if they do, they learn their lesson swiftly from their parents, family, teachers, and religious leaders.) But for those who are at the line ("wannabes"), for the "six percenters," and for those six percenters at the margins who are prepared to commit mayhem, the message — that virtually anything goes, short of violence — is disastrous. In a world in which standards, limits, and adults don't matter, they catapult forward from incivilities to "status" offenses, to stealing and burglary, and on to violence, not only creating enormous damage, but setting themselves up for draconian punishment and even death.

Young people have more to fear than the arbitrariness of a few crotchety parents, teachers or criminal justice officials; their greatest danger is that adults are abandoning them to each other and to their own inexperience and experimentation.

Certainly, prudent school administrators must take short-range security steps to try to avoid tragedies like Littleton. In the long run, however, restoring adult controls over minor offenses and behavior will restore earlier thresholds of youthful misconduct. When a third-grader comes to school dressed in a Beavis and Butthead T-shirt that reads "School Sucks," the right of the teacher to insist that the T-shirt be worn inside out should be beyond challenge.

In the juvenile court, punishment for "minor offenses" should include behavioral restrictions such as curfews, restitution, and community service, and, for repeat minor offenders, swift, certain, and brief detention — even for "status" offenses. Better a child spend a couple of days in detention at age 13 learning about boundaries than running into "three strikes you're out" at age 18. Court policies and laws that diminish the control of parents over their children should be reversed. Politicians and officeholders must use their "bully pulpits" to send a clear message that we will provide proper guidance, including limits, to youth. They must use their legislative mandate to enact laws that give teachers and parents proper authority; and they must use their administrative power to see to it that schools and agencies use their authority to guide children and youth.

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A media-literate kid watching an NRA press conference with Charlton Heston will wonder why the NRA picked Moses as their spokesman in the first place.

The kids are all right

It's the adults, say this media commentator, who have trouble separating reality from fiction.

A social commentator on the wired world and professor of virtual culture at New York University, Douglas Rushkoff has written widely about technology, pop culture, and media. He is the author of such nonfiction books as Media Virus *and* Playing the Future, *which explore the Internet, video game, and science fiction culture of "screenagers" — those who have grown up using computers. His new book, to be published this fall, is entitled* Coercion: Why We Listen to What "They" Say.

Kids generally have a better sense of the difference between play and reality than adults give them credit for. If you look at the reaction to an event like the Littleton tragedy, most adults consider it some kind of cultural phenomenon, whereas most kids would understand that it has little to do with culture, media, or entertainment. It has to do with two messed-up boys who took real guns and killed some people.

In my opinion, it's adults who have trouble separating illusion from reality. Take the way the National Rifle Association sells its message to the public. The man they get to lobby America about the glories of guns is hired for his association with a fictional character, Moses, from a Cecil B. De Mille movie.

Millions of kids around the world play violent video games. Most early computer games like Nintendo and Sega were hand-me-downs from military simulations — airplane flight simulators, combat simulators, etc. As the kids who grew up playing these video games start making video games of their own, we're seeing great alternatives to simple combat games.

Kids today are certainly being exposed to much more information than they were historically — through the Internet and other new media. This might be problematic in some ways. The solution, however, is not to shackle the children or try to censor the web but to teach the children media literacy. The United States is currently the only developed nation in the world that does not mandate media literacy for its public school curriculum.

Kids need to be taught that every message, every show, every commercial, and every movie is created by human beings with a specific point of view and who are using every tool at their disposal to convince the viewer of something. Show kids a McDonald's commercial, a web site, a violent video game, a PBS documentary, or the evening news, and break down the components used to convey a message.

Media literacy is an invaluable critical tool in a democracy. But anyone who can deconstruct a McDonald's commercial can also deconstruct the priest's sermon, the teacher's lesson, CNN, or the President's State of the Union message. A media-literate kid watching an NRA press conference with Charlton Heston will be able to do even more than critically analyze the message; he'll feel compelled to wonder why the NRA picked Charlton Heston as their spokesmodel in the first place.

—Interview by Marilyn Snell

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High-quality programs have produced short-term gains in cognitive functioning and longer-term gains in school achievement and social adjustment.

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Kids need an early start

Universal preschool education may be the best investment Americans can make in our children's education — and our nation's future.

by Isabel Sawhill

The keys to academic success for disadvantaged children may not be smaller class sizes, better-prepared teachers, tougher standards, more accountability, or greater choice — laudable as these goals may be. They may instead hinge on a single factor: preschool.

Because of their family environments, too many children come to school ill-prepared to learn. They lack language skills, social skills, and motivation. In Oxford, Miss., for example, Superintendent John Jordan reports that 5-year-olds sometimes arrive in kindergarten not knowing their own names — only their nicknames. Almost all experts now agree that a preschool experience or its first cousin — high quality, educationally-oriented child care — is one of the most effective strategies for improving later school performance.

Consider the emphasis on reducing class size. The evidence suggests that its major benefits come from the extra socialization that it allows teachers to provide to children in the early grades. Yet a more cost-effective solution is to provide these same children with appropriate experiences before they enter school. Ironically, by attempting to reduce class size, schools are competing for staff with child care and preschool programs — to the detriment of the latter.

What evidence is there that increased support for pre-kindergarten will have the hoped-for effects on school readiness? The best studies strongly suggest that children benefit greatly from an early learning experience. High-quality programs have produced short-term gains in cognitive functioning and longer-term gains in school achievement and social adjustment. Recent reviews of the literature by the Rand Corporation, by Steven Barnett at Rutgers University, and by a team of researchers at the University of Wisconsin conclude that early interventions, especially with disadvantaged children, have produced a variety of positive results. Those results include higher school achievement, less retention in grade, a reduced need for special education at a later age, and less crime. The study estimates that the most effective programs create savings to the government of $13,000 to $19,000 per child above the cost of the pre-school programs themselves. The best results come from programs that begin early, include children from the most disadvantaged homes, and provide intensive education and other services over a lengthy period.

Critics of this literature have emphasized that the purely cognitive gains fade as children age, that the studies are not without their flaws, and that model programs are difficult to take to scale. These critics have tended to focus on IQ improvements and to ignore the improvements in school performance found by most studies. They also expect research to achieve an unobtainable level of certainty about effectiveness.

In the wake of welfare reform, Congress has appropriated substantial sums for child care,

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Done right, high quality child care and early education is a two-time winner: they enable mothers to work and insure that children from high-risk families are ready for school.

recognizing that if we are going to require low-income mothers to work, we must also provide them with a safe place to leave their children. This suggests a world in which both high-quality child care and early education are provided to low-income families. Done right, this would be a two-time winner: enabling mothers to work and ensuring that children from high-risk families were ready for school.

The importance of early education is increasingly recognized at the state level, where public funding of preschool programs is catching on, albeit at an uneven pace. Other countries have also recognized the need to educate children from an early age. In France and Italy, for example, nearly all children 3 to 5 years old are enrolled in publicly funded preschools.

Toward a New Federal Commitment to Early Education

Individual families and some states will undoubtedly continue to make such investments in young children. Some will argue that a federal role is unnecessary or even counterproductive. There is considerable sentiment in this country for keeping education, including preschool, as a state and local responsibility, and this tradition is deeply ingrained. But only the federal government can make sure that all children have equal access to a good education, regardless of the state or community in which they live.

Although providing medical care and retirement benefits to the elderly or even welfare benefits and food stamps to the poor are time-honored federal commitments, these programs are better thought of as picking up the pieces after the education system has failed. Any one state or community that neglects the education of its children imposes large costs on the rest of us.

There are three different ways in which the federal government could intervene:

1. Provide federal funding while allowing states and local communities flexibility to use the money in diverse ways on the condition that they enroll more children in accredited facilities, target modest-income families, and use federal dollars to supplement, not supplant, state spending. Standards for accreditation could be established by states or by the federal government with the advice of professional groups and benchmarked over time against school-readiness scores. A block grant to the states would enable more of them to provide the kind of innovative programs adopted by a number of states in recent years. Georgia and New York, for example, have implemented universal pre-kindergarten programs. California is spending the $750 million a year raised from a tax on tobacco to provide early childhood programs in every community. Some states, such as Indiana and Iowa, are transferring money from their welfare block grant to fund early childhood programs. Federal funding would both accelerate this state-led movement and even out the playing field for children across the country.

2. Provide a more generous (and refundable) tax credit or voucher to lower-income families to be used only in accredited preschool facilities. A tax credit would combine the federal support for education that liberals have supported with the parental choice and competition among providers that conservatives like. Unlike the first option, however, this one doesn't allow much scope for the investments in provider training and infrastructure that many experts believe are necessary and, in the absence of school choice, makes it more difficult to use the public schools as providers.

3. Build on the existing system. For example, the federally funded Head Start program could be expanded to serve all poor and near-poor children for at least two years. Head Start's part-day, part-year schedule should be extended to meet the needs of working parents. The current program serves less than half of all eligible poor children, most in part-day programs for one year, typically at age 4. Moreover, as educational historian Diane Ravitch has argued, Head Start lacks a strong educational component. In recent years, middle class and affluent families have enrolled their children in preschool programs in record numbers; twice as many 3- to 5-year-olds are enrolled among families with incomes above $75,000 as among families with incomes

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Jill Stamm Innovator

Jill Stamm teaches young mothers the importance of early brain development.

A professor at Arizona State University and a national lecturer on infant learning and cognition, Dr. Jill Stamm is also president of New Directions Institute in Arizona. Her organization collects the latest neuroscientific research on brain development in infants up to age three. Her goal is to educate new parents and caregivers about the long-lasting importance of healthy, early brain development in young children.

Genes, environment, caregiving, and nourishment all play very important roles in brain development. New technologies such as PET scans and functional MRI have allowed us to watch the brain functioning in real time and to look at which areas of the brain are activated by specific kinds of stimulation and influences.

This new research attributes about 50 percent of a baby's unique brain function to nature, or genetics, and 50 percent to nurture, or the physical and emotional environment to which that baby is exposed.

When considering the nurture component, we have found that there are windows of opportunity for brain development from zero to three that you can't necessarily make up for later. The brain doesn't develop the way your feet grow: gradually, in regular increments from year to year. The brain reaches 90 percent of its full adult size, capacity, and wiring by age three.

We now know that how a child is touched, nurtured, and spoken to in those early years makes a dramatic difference in how he or she functions later on in life. Violent, stressful, highly hostile environments have been shown to have a direct impact on the biological functioning of that child. Neurologists can actually pinpoint exactly which areas of the brain have been impacted because these areas do not develop normally. Such trauma can cause hyperactivity, compulsivity, and aggressive behavior. In later life, these children are far less able to either modulate their emotions or process information normally. The truth is that science is finally validating what our common sense has long told us.

At New Directions Institute, we are trying to reach parents while their children are still infants. Our first project works with teenage mothers. We train volunteers in the latest research on brain development. Then we match our volunteers with a teen mom who is at risk simply because she's young. The mother's only requirements for the program are that she stays in school and, by self-report, is substance-free. We match her with a mentor for one year.

The focus is specifically on the intellectual development of the child, getting the mother to realize the power she has to impact her baby's brain development; teaching her some straightforward techniques that will help her child develop a kind of emotional intelligence and attachment.

Most developmental interventions have concentrated on the child. Programs like Head Start are wonderful for the children who participate. But my belief is that it is a far wiser use of our resources to educate the caregivers.

The public is only slowly learning about the new brain research and the importance of development from zero to three. Jim Hunt, the Democratic governor of North Carolina, is a leader on this subject. Three years ago, advocates for a program called Smart Start approached Hunt and convinced him of the importance of early development. Smart Start advocates translated this information, which is well-known in the medical community, into practical terms. State legislators were shown slides of PET scans, for instance, comparing the brain of an abused child with that of a nurtured child. The visible differences are compelling. Their bottom line: you can pay now or pay later. The first year, North Carolina allocated $12 million; by last year, it was up to $256 million. This kind of commitment to these first years of life is an intelligent investment in the future.

—Interview by Marilyn Snell

> "The brain doesn't grow like your feet: gradually, from year to year. It reaches 90 percent of its adult-size capacity by age three. How a child is touched and spoken to in those early years makes a dramatic difference."

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Politics will argue for serving more children at a lower cost per child. But this is self-defeating — the inexpensive programs are usually ineffective as well.

Below: Making today's children more productive and better able to use emerging technologies will have long-term economic payoffs.

below $10,000. Although the original intent of the program was to give children from poor families a "head start," they are no longer getting one.

All of these options, if done right, would be expensive. For example, a high-quality, two-year program with full subsidies for families earning up to $30,000 could cost as much as $30 billion annually — about $18 billion more than we are currently spending at the federal level. Politics will always argue for serving more children at a lower cost per child. But in the end this politically satisfying strategy is likely to be self-defeating because inexpensive programs are usually ineffective as well. The lesson from decades of research is that with limited resources, it is better to provide fewer children a quality program that promises to improve their school performance and later success than to spread the money more broadly.

Recent budget debates have emphasized the importance of using the $2.6 trillion in projected federal budget surpluses to "save" Social Security. But an investment in people, especially in young children, has as large or larger a payoff as investing in tangible capital. Rates of return to education have risen sharply since the late 1970s, and evaluations of early childhood programs suggest that they actually save the taxpayer money over the long haul.

Making today's children more productive and better able to use emerging technologies can create a much stronger economy than investing all of our resources in financial capital. Yet we are spending a tiny fraction of total federal resources on children under the age of five, a commitment that is likely to wane further given tight budget caps on discretionary spending. If we want to prepare for the retirement of the baby boom generation, we must not only save more both individually and collectively — we must invest more in the only people who will be around to pay the costs of that retirement: today's young children.

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Show me the results

After years of thorny legislative and judicial battles, there is now a new model for creating equitable funding for schools.

by Andrew Rotherham

In "Harrison Bergeron," Kurt Vonnegut describes a society in which everyone is equal. Athletic people wear weights on their bodies to slow them down, attractive people wear masks, and particularly intelligent people wear devices in their ears that pipe in distracting noise.

By taking notions of societal equality to absurd extremes, Vonnegut reminds us of the limits of such ideals. His reality check applies well to the debate over school finance, reinforcing an important concept: that our goal in school finance is to give every student the resources he or she needs to excel, not to equalize everyone to an arbitrary funding level. We need instead to rationally determine how much a school district needs and work out a plan to deliver that amount. The fact that an affluent district is spending far more than the state mean doesn't necessarily mean that students in other districts are being denied a quality education. The real question is whether lower-spending districts have sufficient revenue to provide a first-class education.

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School James A. McKee Elementary, Elk Grove, Calif.

Three years ago, McKee Elementary School ranked as one of the lowest-performing schools in the Elk Grove, California, school district. But since teachers began administering frequent benchmark tests, reading scores have soared. At the end of the past school year, 85 percent of first-graders were reading above grade level, higher than the district average.

How did McKee do it? By focusing on the bottom line with an assessment program called "Reading Results." "Our teachers have worked very hard to become expert diagnosticians," says district superintendent Dave Gordon. "They now can do almost daily assessments of every student, and teach to the areas where they are weak."

Results came fast. Under the leadership of reading specialist Lynda Peddy, Reading Results produced a detailed picture of every student's reading skills. It pushed first-grade comprehension scores from the 38th to the 71st percentile in one year.

The McKee school's approach is now being copied all over California, with more than 1,200 other schools now using the method. Gov. Gray Davis made the program part of his educational reform package. This summer, more than 6,000 teachers and principals attended institutes called "Focusing on Reading."

Dave Gordon sees the tightly focused assessment program as the key to students' high reading scores. "The sharpness of their diagnosis is crucial to achieving the remedy."

Equitable school funding is a state and local responsibility. In 1973, the Supreme Court took the federal government largely out of the equation, stating in San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez that education "is not among the rights afforded explicit protection under our federal constitution. Nor do we find any basis for saying it is implicitly so protected."

This ruling shifted the legal action to the states, whose constitutions all contain provisions for education. Since local school districts are overwhelmingly dependent on property tax revenue, variations in property wealth put impoverished areas at a tremendous fiscal disadvantage. Impoverished communities often exert a similar or greater tax effort than affluent areas but still raise substantially less money per pupil. To remedy this problem, a "second wave" of school finance litigation, in the quarter century since Rodriguez, has resulted in more than 15 states changing their funding systems.

Much of this litigation aimed to broaden the revenue base for schools. But that is easier in principle than in practice. School finance reform can be either a lever for enhanced student performance or a point of political breakdown. Recent efforts in New Hampshire and Vermont are indicative of the latter, while New Jersey and Wyoming offer more fruitful examples.

In New Hampshire, a deeply rooted hostility to state taxes complicated efforts to overhaul the school funding structure. Any state income tax was a deal killer. In the past, New Hampshire schools were 87 percent dependent on local revenue for operating costs and received only 7 percent from the state. The new system does incorporate a statewide property tax and a variety of other revenue raisers — but no state income tax — to provide a much greater share of spending from the state. But the process was so long and painful-at one point many of the state's teachers were pink-slipped-that it is mostly a reminder of how not to reform school finance.

In Vermont, a practice known as "power equalizing" was adopted. Not only was funding equalized between school districts, but communities raising money above the required statewide rate — referred to as "local share property

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tax" in Vermont — are required to contribute to a statewide pool for redistribution. While this is a liberal's Walter Mitty fantasy, in reality it creates resentment and undermines support for public schools in many communities. It is not likely to be a tenable solution in the long run.

Two radically different state solutions — in New Jersey and Wyoming — provide good models for state legislators to study. In both, officials studied exactly how much revenue is required to deliver the services they want and structured their financing system accordingly. They relied on a small but growing body of research into how much money is a sufficient "performance baseline."

In New Jersey, school finance litigation has been a fixture in policy debates for 25 years. The state Supreme Court had found that several districts were underfunded. However, in 1998 a review court ruled that impoverished districts received adequate resources to allow children to meet performance standards. They found that the districts had enough money to implement the most expensive "whole school" reform model on the market. Rather than looking at historical data or assumptions about costs, the court looked at what it would cost a school district to provide a challenging and effective curriculum.

In Wyoming, extensive studies determined how much revenue was required to deliver a basket of services that would allow students to meet performance standards. The system was restructured to provide adequate revenue for all districts to meet this goal. Panels of school administrators and principals from districts outside Wyoming with demographics similar to the affected school districts were consulted. Experts who understood the market were asked to determine whether it was possible to reach stated goals with the funding plan. According to an analysis by a respected school finance consulting firm, sufficient resources are now in place.

New Jersey and Wyoming share a common thread. Rather than simply argue about what a reasonable amount of funding is, officials in both states set out to determine it. They set performance goals, ensured that sufficient revenue was in place for students in all school districts to achieve them, and held people accountable for their performance. This sort of approach, championed most notably by Allan Odden of the University Wisconsin, holds great promise for resolving some of the thornier issues of school finance and building a more constructive dialogue about standards and accountability.

Andrew Rotherham is director of the 21st Century Schools Project at the Progressive Policy Institute.

School finance reform can either be a lever for enhanced student performance or a point of political breakdown. Recent state efforts offer examples of both.

Officials in New Jersey and Wyoming set out to determine what amount of funding is the right amount by setting performance goals, ensuring that sufficient revenue was in place for students in all districts to achieve them, and holding people accountable for their performance.

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A different *kind* of success

With the right type of support, the nation's two-year community colleges can make the American dream work for millions of young people who are now left behind.

by Daniel Yankelovich

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A NEW REALITY about the global economy is slowly sinking into the American consciousness.The rewards for having the right skills can be spectacular, while the consequences for not having them are devastating.

When assembly lines and strong trade unions dominated American manufacturing, it was possible to make a good living without bringing special skills to the job. Workers may have complained about being hired "from the neck down," but they were well paid. However, the disparity in rewards between the millions of minimum-wage dead-end jobs and the more interesting, knowledge-intensive jobs is growing explosively. Today, the economic prospects for young Americans without skills are as grim as the prospects for those with the right skills are glowing.

The broad earnings gap between high school graduates and college graduates has made Americans less complacent about the education their children receive. Most parents realize their children must acquire high levels of education to avoid downward mobility. Employers are even more concerned than parents, complaining that the high school graduates they see lack basic math, writing, grammar and spelling skills.

Above: We need new options that not only teach technical skills to young people such as these junior college students, but also bestow credentials that are equivalent or superior to a four-year college degree.

Daniel Yankelovich is president of Public Agenda Foundation and chairman of DYG, Inc., a research firm. His most recent book, The Magic of Dialogue, *will be released this fall.*

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Innovator James Hubbell

James Baldwin once talked about the "low ceilings" of poor children's lives — where hope and imagination are compressed. Award-winning San-Diego-based artist and architect James Hubbell has "lifted the ceilings" for children in one of Tijuana, Mexico's, poorest colonias. The beautiful pre- and primary school Hubbell designed and helped build over eight years (with more than 1,000 volunteers), is a small jewel, a prized possession of the families in Colonia Esperanza — and may suggest ways that American school architecture can honor the dreams of future generations.

Most of the families in Tijuana are immigrants from other parts of Mexico. They don't all mix well; there are a lot of cultural differences and tensions. Our thinking about the Esperanza school was that if we could make it beautiful it would help bridge some of the differences; it could act as a gathering place for children and for the wider community.

We also thought that such a school would attract the attention of the government and the wealthy. There are something like 70 colonias, or neighborhoods, in Tijuana, and none of them has really been planned, so in the government's eyes they don't quite exist. In order to be seen or considered important, you have to first be named. Of course, you can get named by committing great violence. That is often how poor communities get a name-by being dangerous. But if you have a school and it's really beautiful and people know it and want to come to the community to see it, then when you go down to the city offices and say 'we'd like sewers,' they know who you are. A beautiful school confers a certain degree of power and prestige on the neighborhood.

We wanted to build a school that would say in its very design that the children themselves are important. We accomplished this partly through the design and partly because the families could see that there was a lot of love and effort put into the building.

If you go to a school and the windows are coming out and the ceilings are falling in, it's pretty clear that students are not really a priority. If we build ugly schools that look and feel like prisons or holding pens, it's because that's where we think children should be.

I've long been fascinated by the idea that the conscious world is made up of joy and pathos, and that the way we strike a balance between joy and pathos in our everyday lives is through beauty. Beauty can help us live well in a complicated world-it can act as a bridge between hope and desperation.

When I went to Tijuana, I had to suspend my knowledge of how to make buildings and instead learn from my immediate surroundings. How do the kids play in this desert city? What dreams do the parents have for their children? By contemplating the surroundings, observing the kids at play, I knew what to do.

What really matters comes through our physical relationship to the world and to each other. It's important that kids feel comfortable in the natural world as well as in the world of ideas. At the school, we wanted to encourage excitement about both ideas and real things, so we started a permaculture garden — which to me is probably as important as the school building itself. My feeling is that if a child knows he can grow a carrot, he doesn't have to be frightened of going hungry, and he can then give himself over to the pursuit of learning, laughing, and dreaming about the future. *—Interview by Marilyn Snell*

"We wanted to build a school that would say in its very design that the children are important. If we build ugly schools that look and feel like prisons or holding pens, it's because that's where we think children should be," says Hubbell.

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Young people have not failed to respond. Educational aspirations are high and rising: Between 1970 and 1997, the percentage of Americans 25 and older who had completed four years of college more than doubled (from 11 percent to 24 percent), and the percentage of high school graduates increased sharply (from 55 percent to 82 percent). Still, more than three out of four adult Americans lack a four-year college education.

If our high schools do a bum job of preparing young Americans for the new global economy and the vast majority lack a college education, then the nation has a serious problem. on its hands.

A High-Status Skill Development Option

To create a new tier of middle-class jobholders with prospects for advancement, we need new educational options that not only teach young people the technical skills most in demand, but also bestow credentials that are equivalent or superior in status to those given by an average four-year college.

Imparting technical skills is not enough. The nation has plenty of sound vocational programs, but they do not appeal to young people — and for good reason. As matters stand today, the graduate of a mediocre four-year college who has acquired no useful skills has far better life chances than the graduate of an excellent vocational program who has learned a variety of useful skills. This is because employers are willing to invest far more in training college graduates than in training those without college credentials, whatever their skills.

In an increasingly competitive world economy, this anomaly is likely to cause all kinds of trouble. If tens of millions of Americans are frustrated economically while others benefit through no special virtue beyond their parents' ability to pay for misleading credentials, then neither our democracy nor our economy benefits.

Our colleges and universities have not adjusted to the idea that traditional IQ is just one kind of intelligence whereas many forms are called for in the workplace. These include entrepreneurial and improvisational skills, perseverance, judgment, salesmanship, and technical capabilities not measured, imparted nor highly valued in colleges.

What we need is a new Skill Development Option, developed in institutions that do not separate "training" and "education" as sharply as colleges do, that are not rigidly tied to the four-year post-high-school residential model — and that employers view as imparting skills needed for workplace performance at levels as high or higher than four-year colleges.

Fortunately, we have in place an institution ideally situated to manage the majority of the necessary tasks: the nation's two-year community colleges. With the right kind of support, they can greatly improve the life chances of a majority of our youth.

If our high schools do a bum job of preparing young Americans for the new economy, and the vast majority lack a college education, then the nation has a serious problem.

Many young people lack the maturity when they are growing up to take full advantage of educational opportunities. Later on, they need a second chance.

The Community College

Community colleges have a track record of success in helping people develop needed skills. They are local institutions with close ties to city, county, regional, and state governments and institutions — and with local employers who can assist in training and job placement.

However, the nation's community colleges need a great deal of support if they are to compensate for a deeply flawed K-12 system of public education and also ease the school-to-work transition for our neediest young people. Wide variations in dropout rates suggest that some are more successful than others at educating and training this population.

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Employers agree on the handful of cognitive and communication skills needed for the best jobs. People who possess them have the flexibility changing conditions will require.

A close study of those that succeed should pay off handsomely. As a society, we know a lot about how to spread the best practice to a wider base. What we need is the political will to do so.

Community colleges (or equivalent institutions) must fill the need for:

- vast improvements in techniques for matching people to jobs and for assessing peoples' work capabilities and multiple intelligences. (Most young people do not know what opportunities are open to them, what requirements these demand, and what their undeveloped gifts are.)
- large numbers of second-chance remedial institutions.
- programs to teach and to reinforce the moral virtues of responsibility, perseverance, cooperation, self-discipline, and hope.
- a well-conceived marketing program designed to endow the new skill development strategy with the high status now associated with a four-year degree from an average college.

One of the most striking characteristics of less well-educated populations is their lack of information. The nation has access to many resources to fill this need: computer-driven data bases, new methods of individual assessment that do not try to fit everyone into the same mold. The trick is to make this information available and useful to the individual.

Community colleges are also well-positioned to become second-chance institutions. Many young people lack the maturity and the incentive when they are growing up to take full advantage of their educational opportunities. Later on, in their 20s or 30s or even later in life, they develop the requisite maturity and incentive, but have no practical means of getting a second chance. Community colleges can fill this need for millions.

The only way to win enduring public support for a long-term initiative such as this is to base it on the American public's own priorities. In particular, it must match the public's sense of urgency, its spirit of fairness, and its insistence on self-reliance and on practicality. The program proposed here meets these four requirements.

Americans today are prepared to give considerable priority to addressing the problems of our nation's young people, and they recognize that a lack of job skills is a significant source of those problems. True, research shows that most Americans look at today's teen-agers with misgivings. They feel that kids are not developing the ethical and moral values needed to become responsible adults — views strongly affected by a focus on such problems as teen-age pregnancy, youth violence, and

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crime. Yet Americans have not given up on kids and believe that helping young people is of paramount importance.

They are also well aware of the huge disparities between the incomes of haves and have-nots. They regard programs designed to help have-nots improve themselves as fair if such programs are based on the principle of reciprocity, especially if they involve education.

It is true that the public is deeply skeptical of government efforts to solve social problems, partly based on the perception that past efforts have not achieved practical results. However, the more the public has come to mistrust institutions, the more confidence it has expressed in the ability of individuals to control their own lives. Young people willing to sacrifice time, energy, and resources so they may acquire new skills squarely meet the public insistence on self-reliance.

There is a traditional American ethos embodied in the "American Dream": If you work hard, live by the rules, and make the effort to better yourself through education, you can succeed in our society better than in any other nation on earth. Remarkably, despite all of the transformations in social values in recent years, this faith persists. An upgraded community college system can make this dream work for millions of Americans.

What About the Demand Side?

If we greatly increase the supply of more highly skilled Americans, will there be enough jobs for them to fill? It is customary to answer by projecting the size of the demand for specific kinds of jobs (e.g., medical technicians, computer programmers, electronic equipment repair people). But in the global economy of today, this approach is impractical. So swift is the tempo of economic change that the most promising jobs in the future will be those that do not exist today, created by companies that have just been launched.

Fortunately, we do not have to tie our economic fate to projections of the demand for specific jobs. Corporate employers are convinced that certain core skills are common to almost all good jobs. The most elementary is literacy. If you are not literate or numerate, you cannot find and hold a good job. Once beyond this elementary level, you can add a wide range of technical skills.

In a recent study my firm conducted, we found that employers agreed on the handful of cognitive and communication skills needed for the best jobs. These include: analytic ability, the ability to articulate one's views, the ability to make coherent presentations, flexibility in acquiring new skills, and the ability to work harmoniously with people who come from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Employers believe that people with these and related skills will have the flexibility to change jobs as conditions require.

The fundamental issue is whether our economy is vital enough to keep growing and to keep creating jobs in response to bottomless consumer demand. (Consumer spending now fuels two-thirds of our economy.) That depends on the future competitiveness of the American economy, which in turn depends on our having a highly educated, highly skilled workforce. With an ever larger number of well-trained people, the chances are that if the world economy remains relatively peaceful and stable, we will maintain our competitive edge and with it create tens of millions of good new jobs.

If we greatly increase the supply of more highly skilled Americans, will there be enough jobs for them to fill? That's the wrong question.

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A hunger for reform

by Mark J. Penn

Americans are asking important questions about education: As jobs move dramatically to knowledge-based industries in the highly competitive global economy, can our education system produce a new generation ready to succeed in the 21st century? Is the system working? What is wrong with it, and how can we fix it? Does it need a Band-Aid or a major reform? And what role should the government play in developing solutions?

These are some of the questions we set out to answer in a nationwide telephone survey of 502 adults conducted by Penn, Schoen and Berland between June 17-20, 1999. The poll's margin of error is ±4.4 percent.

The highlights of this survey include:

- **Americans think the public schools are in crisis — and despite a decade of talk about reform, they give them no higher grade than a decade ago.**
- **Columbine has put discipline and lack of parental involvement atop Americans' list of concerns about the schools.**
- **Despite their concerns about public education and the fact that they see some virtue in private school vouchers, Americans remain committed to fixing our public schools.**
- **Americans want accountability for performance and consequences for failure in the public school system — including the firing of bad teachers and the closing of failing schools.**
- **Americans support a variety of innovative approaches to improving education.**
- **In an electorate where there are more Independents than either Democrats or Republicans, tough education reform with accountability and consequences will allow Democrats an opportunity to win over key swing-voting Independents.**

Mark J. Penn is the president of Penn, Schoen and Berland Associates, Inc., and the pollster to President Clinton and Vice President Gore. Research and polling assistance provided by Jeff Epstein.

Full results of this poll can be found at www.dlc.org/blueprint/fall/99/poll.htm.

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1. Education is at a Crossroads

Over two-thirds of the public are dissatisfied with the way public education is working in this country. Two-thirds think that there is a crisis in public education. Nearly 50 percent give the public schools in our country a "C" grade, and only two percent give schools an "A." While this grade has remained the same compared to past surveys, the increasing importance of education has boosted the public's desire to do something about it.

Q: In general, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way public education is working in this country?

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Child In School	GenX
Satisfied	28	32	25	27	39	32
Dissatisfied	67	61	72	69	60	67

Q: Do you think there is a crisis in public education in our country today, or not?

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Child In School	GenX
Yes	66	60	76	64	63	63
No	30	32	23	33	33	34

Q: Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, and Fail to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the public schools themselves in this community were graded the same way. What grade would you give the public schools nationally?

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	1989[1]	1994[2]
A-B	21	28	21	17	22	22
C	48	45	55	48	47	49
D-F	19	21	18	20	19	23

Q: Do you think that education today is more important than it used to be, less important than it used to be, or of about the same importance?

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Child In School	GenX
More important	74	77	72	73	67	66
Less important	9	8	12	8	14	16
About the same importance	16	14	15	19	18	18

2. Americans are Committed to Fixing Our Public Schools

While voters indicate that there are problems with our public schools, they are overwhelmingly committed to investing in and fixing public education. Nearly all Americans (96 percent) think that it is important to strengthen the public schools. Seven in ten (71 percent) think that we should be using all available government resources to help the public schools improve, rather than helping people go to private school with government help.

Q: How important do you think it is to strengthen the public schools — very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important?

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.
Important	96	96	95	95
Not important	2	2	3	2

1. Surveys by the Gallup Organization for Phi Delta Kappa, 1974-1997.
2. Ibid.

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Q: Do you think we should be helping people to go to private school with government help, or should we be using all available government resources to help the public schools improve?

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.
Helping people go to private schools	24	13	36	25
Using all available resources to improve public schools	71	82	60	71

Furthermore, most Americans believe we need a major overhaul of the system, unusual in an America that has become more comfortable with change in bite-sized doses. Fully 53 percent say that we need major change in our public schools and that we need to overhaul the way we look at public education, while 44 percent say that we need to make minor adjustments and changes to the current system.

Q: Some people say that we need major change in our public schools and that we need to overhaul the way we look at public education; others say that we need to make minor adjustments and changes to the current system. Which is closer to your view?

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Child in School	GenX
Major changes	53	46	55	57	51	41
Minor adjustments and changes to the current system	44	51	42	42	47	59

3. The Columbine Effect

On April 20th of this year, the country was reminded that violence in our public schools is neither a passing phase nor a problem unique to urban schools. More than half (55 percent) of parents surveyed by CNN/Gallup/*USA Today* the day after the shootings said that they feared for their child's safety when he or she was at school.[3]

The Columbine shootings had a dramatic effect on how we perceive problems in our public schools. Two specific and telling issues rise to the surface when Americans are asked to name the biggest causes of the problems in our public schools. First, Americans believe that parents need to more involved in their schools. Second, they believe that there is a lack of discipline in the classroom.

Just 8 percent say the biggest cause of problems in public schools is not enough funding, only 5 percent say the problem is too much federal regulation, and only 2 percent say the problem is lack of school choice.

Q: Which of the following do you think is the biggest cause of the problems in our public schools? Second biggest?

	1st	1st + 2nd	1st + 2nd		
			Dem.	Rep.	Ind.
Not enough parental involvement	28	47	48	49	46
Lack of discipline in the classroom	21	36	33	40	36
School bureaucracy and union rules get in the way	11	20	16	29	16
Too many pupils per class	9	18	23	13	19
Not enough funding	8	19	22	8	22
Poor teacher quality	6	20	22	21	19
Too much federal regulation	5	12	6	14	17
Low academic standards	5	12	13	14	6
Parents have no choice on which school to send their children	2	7	8	5	6

3. CNN/Gallup/USA Today survey of 659 adults conducted April 21, 1999, margin of error ±4%.

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COLUMBINE: LEARNING FROM THE TRAGEDY

Since the shootings, the public has been engaged in a debate over how to prevent further tragedies from occurring. Solutions range from placing a copy of the ten commandments in every classroom, to installing metal detectors at every school entrance. While both of these are radical solutions, they focus on passive versus active prevention. Do we teach our children that violence does not resolve conflicts? Do we try identifying troubled children in advance? Or do we work to restrict minors from having access to weapons?

Fully 91 percent support providing character education — including manners and values — in public schools, and intensity is high (66 percent strongly support). Additionally, 81 percent support establishing community policing in schools as a way of identifying early warning signals and preventing discipline problems or safety hazards from erupting into greater tragedies (55 percent strongly support).

Providing character education — including manners and values — in public schools.

Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose this proposal?

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	GenX	Suburban
Strongly support	66	59	67	71	57	53
Total support	91	85	94	92	92	84
Total oppose	7	14	4	6	6	13

Establishing community policing in schools as a way of identifying early warning signals and preventing discipline problems or safety hazards from erupting into greater tragedies.

Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose this proposal?

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	GenX	Suburban
Strongly support	55	51	66	49	65	48
Total support	81	76	84	82	90	86
Total oppose	15	19	12	17	9	11

4. Educational Solutions

Even though Americans do not see a lack of funding as the biggest problem facing the schools, they do believe that we need to make additional commitments to public education — smaller classes and better trained and paid teachers are at the top of their list. Additional popular solutions were placing more emphasis on discipline and character, as well as setting higher school standards.

Q: What do you think is the best way to improve the public schools?

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.
More funding to reduce class size and raise teacher salaries	22	25	15	22
More parental and community involvement in the schools	20	20	25	18
More emphasis on discipline and character	18	20	22	14
Higher standards	17	19	13	19
More competition between public and private schools	6	2	7	8
Less federal government involvement	6	5	4	9
More choice among public schools	5	3	10	4

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Voters demonstrated support for a range of unique and sometimes dramatic proposals, particularly those aimed at improving teacher quality. Eight in ten strongly supported testing all teachers periodically to make sure they are competent and qualified to teach, while two-thirds supported both paying teachers based on the value that they bring to the classroom and empowering schools to remove low-performing teachers.

Other strong proposals included strengthening community colleges to prepare students who will not attend a four-year college, but still require some post-high school education (73 percent strongly support), and providing character education (66 percent strongly support). Overall, 12 out of 16 proposals enjoyed more than 60 percent support.

5. Charter Schools

Charter schools remain the sleeper of the educational reform movement. They are popular in concept, but still not widely known or understood. A majority doesn't know what charter schools are (37 percent think that they are private schools), but two-thirds of those who venture an opinion of them have a positive impression of them. When described, over six in ten (63 percent) overall favor charter schools, and only a quarter (26 percent) oppose them. While Democrats are slightly less likely to favor charter schools (54 percent favor, 29 percent oppose), critical groups that represent the electorate of the future — GenXers and Wired Workers — are more likely to favor charter schools. Three in four GenXers (76 percent) and Wired Workers (73 percent) favor charter schools.

Furthermore, just over half of respondents indicated that they would consider sending their child to a charter school, while a third (32 percent) would not. Again, GenXers and Wired Workers are more supportive of charter schools than most, indicating a willingness on the part of the workers of tomorrow to look toward new solutions to improve the quality of education.

Q: Charter schools are public schools that are run by teachers, parents, or private companies and financed by the state on a per-pupil basis. They are held accountable for achieving educational results, and in return they receive waivers that exempt them from many of the restrictions and bureaucratic rules that apply to traditional public schools. Given this, do you favor or oppose charter schools?

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	GenX	Wired Workers
Favor	63	54	74	67	76	73
Oppose	26	29	18	28	18	19

Q: Would you consider sending your child to a charter school, or not?

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	GenX	Wired Workers
Yes	55	44	67	60	65	67
No	32	41	22	31	30	23

6. Bridges to a Solid Start and a Strong Completion

Americans support educational measures that address not only elementary and secondary education, but also measures that increase opportunities for preschool and post-secondary students.

Universal Preschool

Support for universal preschool is overwhelming, with 85 percent supporting the idea. A similar number, nearly nine in ten, believe that a program that would allow all children to have the opportunity to attend preschool should be an important priority, and six in ten believe it should be a very important priority. Out of those with children under five, seven in ten believe that it should be a very important priority.

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Q: Now I am going to read some proposals that have been made for improving public education. For each one, please tell me if you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the proposal:

	Strongly Support	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.
Universal preschool, so that all parents could send their children to preschool	59	85/14	87/11	77/22	88/10

Q: Do you think that universal preschool that would allow all children to have the opportunity to attend preschool, should be a very important priority, a somewhat important priority, not a very important priority, or not at all an important priority?

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Kids Under 5	GenX
Very Important	61	71	54	59	71	72
Important	88	93	82	88	88	93
Not Important	11	5	17	11	10	6

Support for universal preschool remains strong, even when it is challenged as a big government solution. Nearly two-thirds of voters (65 percent) agree that universal preschool will ensure that all children start public school on more equal footing, while only 28 percent agree that it will be the start of another costly government handout and we should put our education money towards other priorities. Ideological moderates overwhelmingly endorse this view — 80 percent agree with the pro-universal preschool statement.

Q: Some people say that universal preschool will ensure that all children start public school on an equal footing. Others say that this will be the start of another costly government handout. Which is closer to your view?

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Kids Under 5	Moderates
Will ensure all children start on equal footing	65	73	55	66	77	80
Start of another costly government handout	28	18	37	30	15	16

Opportunities For High School Graduates

Americans strongly support two proposals that help bridge the gap from high school to college and the workforce. Over nine in ten (93 percent) support strengthening community colleges to academically prepare young adults who do not attend university, but need more skills before entering the work force. Over eight in ten (83 percent) support a program for poor academic performers in secondary schools to prepare for college.

Q: Now I am going to read some proposals that have been made for improving public education. For each one, please tell me if you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the proposal:

	Strongly Support	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.
Strengthening community colleges to academically prepare kids who will not attend a four-year college, but still require more education before entering the work force	73	93/6	86/10	94/5	96/2
Establishing intensive preparatory academies for college bound, yet academically low-performing students, that can raise them up to an equal standard and prepare them for college	46	83/14	86/11	75/20	83/16

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7. Teacher Quality

Poor teacher quality is seen as a major obstacle to achieving successful public schools, and proposals aimed at removing that obstacle were among the top scoring educational proposals overall. All five proposals to address teacher quality enjoyed over 75 percent support, with 94 percent supporting the top-scoring proposal for periodic testing of teachers to ensure that they are qualified and competent.

Q: Now I am going to read some proposals that have been made for improving public education. For each one, please tell me if you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the proposal:

	Strongly Support	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.
Testing all teachers periodically to make sure they are competent and qualified to teach	83	94/4	90/7	96/4	96/3
Paying teachers not based on seniority, but based on the value that they bring to the classrooms, as measured by improvements in their students test scores	66	84/14	79/18	79/19	92/7
Empowering schools to remove low-performing teachers fairly but easily	65	92/6	90/7	85/3	92/8
Offering alternative teacher certification, based on teachers' abilities rather than their degrees or credentials	47	80/17	73/20	87/10	81/18
Establishing a national teacher corps, through which people would spend four years as public school teachers in disadvantaged school districts, in exchange for college tuition	39	77/18	76/23	78/15	78/18

In general, six in ten think that the quality of our teachers is a problem in the public schools. Those who are dissatisfied with the direction of our public schools are more likely to be pessimistic about the quality of our teachers—69 percent of those dissatisfied with the direction of public education say teacher quality is a problem. However, a majority (57 percent) of those who are satisfied with our public schools think that teacher quality is not a problem.

Interestingly, those with children currently in school are less likely to say that teacher quality is a problem—a slim majority of 52 percent say it is a problem, and 45 percent say it is not a problem.

Q: Do you think that the quality of our teachers is a problem in the public schools, or not?

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Child in School
Yes	60	55	64	63	69	39	52
No	34	39	31	34	26	57	45

While there is some disagreement over whether teacher quality is a problem in the public schools, voters universally support giving schools the ability to remove low-performing teachers. Ninety-five percent overall, and more than 90 percent of nearly every demographic group, support this principle regardless of whether or not they feel teacher quality is a problem.

Q: Do you think that schools should have the ability to remove low performing teachers, or not?

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Child in School
Yes	95	93	97	95	95	94	97
No	5	6	3	4	4	6	3

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8. National Standards and Accountability

Public opinion has crystalized in favor of national educational standards. Nearly seven in ten — 69 percent — think that all students should have to meet such standards. This is a surprising public consensus on an issue that has drawn so much fire in the media.

And a majority would even favor the ultimate step of shutting down schools that are failing (58/38).

Again, Wired Workers and GenXers are slightly more likely to support such changes — 78 percent of wired workers and 73 percent of GenXers support a single, agreed upon set of national standards, compared with 69 percent overall. This may reflect an insight into how important these skills will be in the economy of the future.

Q: Do you think that all students should have to meet a single, agreed upon set of national standards, or not?

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Wired Worker	GenX
Yes	69	68	69	69	78	73
No	27	27	29	25	19	26

Q: Now I am going to read some proposals that have been made for improving public education. For each one, please tell me if you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the proposal:

	Strongly Support	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.
Encouraging states to agree to voluntary standards and tests that can serve as common benchmarks to compare students across state lines	40	73/20	70/23	71/23	76/17
Transforming all schools so that each would have the freedom to set its own curriculum, but be held accountable for getting educational results	35	70/27	70/28	72/21	69/32
Performance contracts for each school that would hold them accountable to performance goals and shut down schools that do not meet the minimum standards	33	58/38	55/44	65/33	56/36

Americans' demands for accountability hold up when challenged

A majority of 56 percent believe that these standards will hold all schools accountable and produce results-oriented schools, while only a third (33 percent) disagree and claim that standards will reduce inventiveness and creativity, forcing teachers to teach to the tests. Parents with children in the schools are more likely to believe that standards will reduce inventiveness and creativity — 43 percent of parents with children in school believe this is true (50 percent do not).

Q: Some people say that establishing standards will hold all schools accountable and produce results-oriented schools. Others say that such standards will reduce inventiveness and creativity, forcing teachers to teach to national tests. Which is closer to your view?

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Child In School	Wired Worker
Will hold all schools accountable	56	60	51	57	50	62
Will reduce inventiveness and creativity	33	27	39	34	43	33

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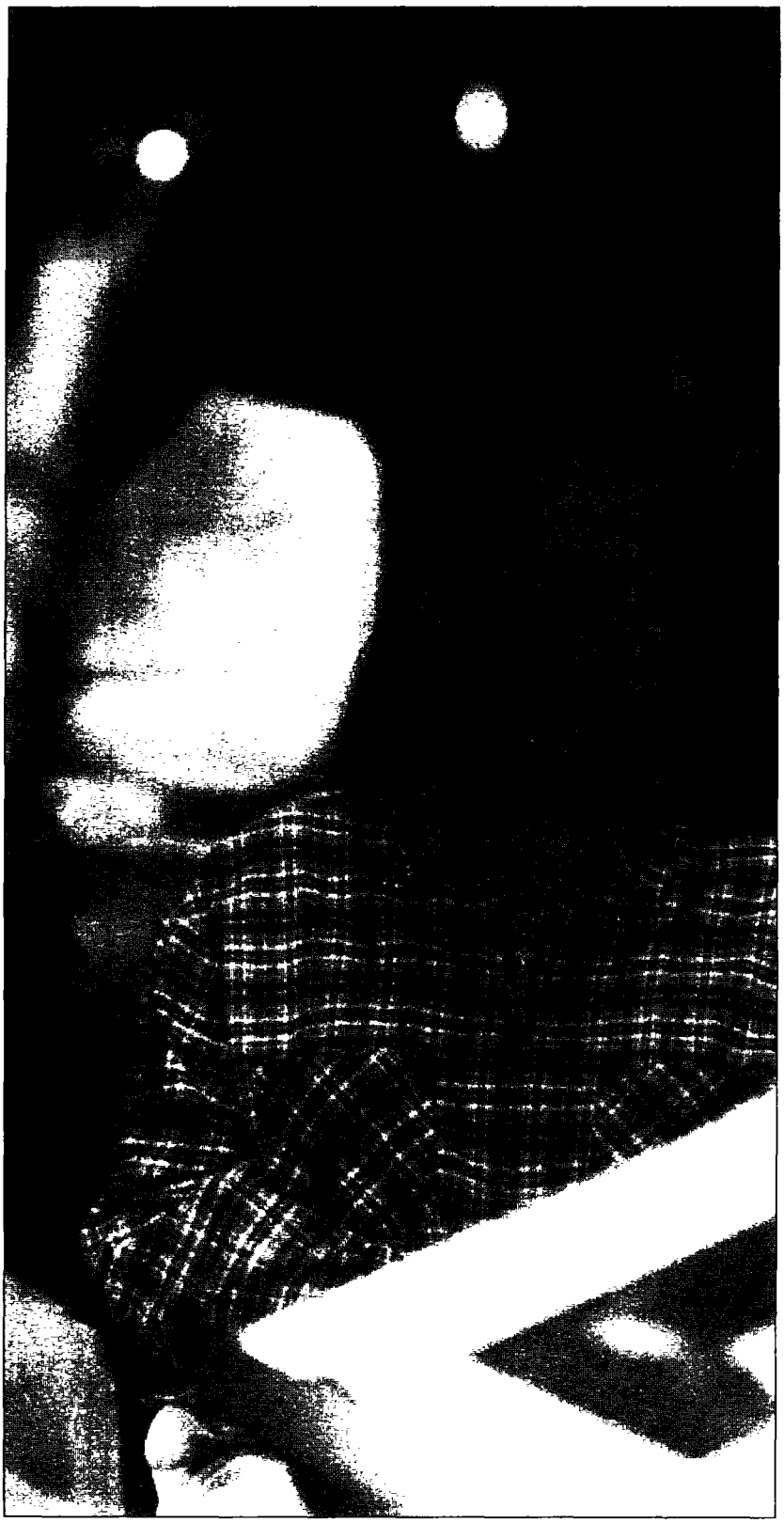

In Oxford, Miss., School Superintendent John Jordan is combining local flexibility and initiative with federal resources to help academically at-risk kids get off to a strong start in school.

About 48 percent of the district's children live in poverty; Head Start only reaches about 40 percent of those eligible for services. But with federal funds under Title I, Jordan offers some of Oxford's disadvantaged youngsters an early boost.

In the summer, Jordan puts the word out in community centers, churches, and civic groups that the school district offers four-year-olds a free reading assessment. Children scoring below the 50th percentile will be offered an enrichment program that includes a half-day of reading instruction and a hot lunch for the entire school year.

Students are taught by qualified teachers rather than aides; being a close neighbor of the University of Mississippi makes it easier for Jordan to attract high-quality instructors.

In the first year of the program, thirty children participated and a similar number is expected for the second year. In fact, many parents whose children scored above the 50th percentile have been lobbying Jordan to allow their kids to participate. With limited funds he must currently restrict it to at-risk children, but he hopes to expand it in the future.

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9. Alternative Education Proposals

Vouchers

The debate over school vouchers that has been percolating for several years now seems ready to explode. With Florida authorizing one of the largest state voucher programs in the country and the 2000 presidential race nearly upon us, Democrats and Republicans have been drawing lines in the sand over the voucher issue.

The concern over the public school system extends to some initial support—which has been growing in recent years—for vouchers. Fifty-four percent favored the concept at first.

But Americans' commitment to public education quickly over rides the appeal of vouchers when the idea is presented as a choice between helping people go to private school with government money (24 percent) versus using all available government resources to help the public schools improve (71 percent).

Q: Some say that giving parents of children in low-performing schools a voucher that would allow them to choose alternatives including private schools will promote equal opportunity and encourage weak schools to improve; others say that this would take funds away from the neediest schools, spend public dollars without accountability, and make the situation even worse. Which is closer to your view?

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Male	Female	Moderate
Vouchers promote equal opportunity	54	51	67	48	60	48	50
Vouchers make the situation even worse	38	40	24	44	36	40	44

Q: Do you think we should be helping people to go to private school with government help, or should we be using all available government resources to help the public schools improve?

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Male	Female	Moderate
Help people go to private school	24	13	36	25	29	20	19
Use all resources for public schools	71	82	60	71	66	76	78

A majority of Americans also prefer public school choice to vouchers, although the idea does not enjoy overwhelming support when it is described as forcing competition between public schools. Nearly six in ten (58 percent) prefer allowing all parents to send their children to whichever public school they think is best, while only one-third prefer allowing parents of children in low-performing schools to choose alternative schools such as private schools. In terms of school competition, however, a small majority of 54 percent supports forcing the schools to compete against each other by giving parents a choice on which public school they send their children to.

Q: Which would you prefer—allowing parents of children in low performing schools to choose alternative schools including private schools, or allowing all parents to send their children to whichever public school they think is best.

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Wired Worker	Moderate
Allow parents in low-performing schools to choose including private schools	33	25	42	33	30	28
Allow all parents to send their children to the best public school	58	67	47	57	56	60

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Q: Now I am going to read some proposals that have been made for improving public education. For each one, please tell me if you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the proposal:

	Strongly Support	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.
Force the schools to compete against each other by giving parents a choice on which public school they send their children to	32	54/41	54/43	47/48	59/38

More Time In School

Proposals to lengthen the school year or increase the amount of time that schools are open during the day met with tepid reactions. Just over six in ten (62 percent) think that kids spend just about the right amount of time in school, and two-thirds of both Democrats and Republicans agree. Additionally, 70 percent of those with children in school say their children spend just about the right amount of time in school. Wired Workers, perhaps because they value education in the New Economy more than others, are much more likely to say that kids don't spend enough time in school (47 percent, compared with 33 percent overall).

Q: Do you think that kids spend too much time in school, not enough time, or just about the right amount of time in schools?

	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Child in School	Wired Workers
Too much	3	1	2	4	2	1
Not enough	33	30	30	37	28	47
Just about right	62	66	66	58	70	50

Q: Now I am going to read some proposals that have been made for improving public education. For each one, please tell me if you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the proposal:

	Strongly Support	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.
Lengthening the school year to year round schooling	28	45/54	54/44	43/55	37/63
Keeping school doors open twelve hours a day	17	41/54	43/53	36/57	40/55
Expanding school hours and the school year to create 12-12 schools — 12 month school years in schools that are kept open 12 hours a day	14	28/68	37/55	14/84	29/67

Conclusion

Americans now believe strongly in educational reform at all levels. They are less concerned with debates over local vs. federal issues than they are about a national plan of action for our schools. They understand the growing importance of a good education to economic success, and see America's schools as not making the grade for today or for tomorrow.

Consequently, they overwhelmingly favor preschool, smaller classes, national educational standards, increased competition, tough measures for failing schools, and increased measures to ensure teacher quality and professionalism.

But they also see an America that has gone through changes that are affecting the values of the next generation. The growth of two-career couples and single parent households, along with the decreased time parents spend with their kids, has raised concerns over whether parents are expecting too much from their schools without themselves giving enough of a commitment in return. That is why parental involvement and student discipline are at the top of the list of changes voters believe our educational system needs. Clearly the public is sending a message that our schools can't succeed unless parents also succeed with the right values at home.

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Open door policy

An after-hours educational play center is just one of the programs spawned by a creative partnership between the Children's Aid Society and a community school district in New York city.

The range of activities is practically limitless: African dancing, health clinics, job training — whatever makes sense to the neighborhood.

In full service schools, children engage in creative educational projects, community service, and cultural enrichment from early in the morning till evening and all summer long.

by Joy G. Dryfoos

In West Philadelphia, a group of middle school students studies botany by growing herbs hydroponically, then selling them in neighborhood markets. Another young woman who dreams of becoming a doctor spends her after-school hours in a white coat performing community service at the local hospital.

These programs result from an innovative collaboration between the University of Pennsylvania and local schools to invent new learning experiences in the classroom and city. These programs are not alone. In dozens of states and cities, educators and their community partners are pursuing a new vision — the full service community school.

In full service schools, children engage in creative educational projects, community service, and cultural enrichment from early in the morning till evening and all summer long. Parents are welcome. There is access to health and mental health services provided by outside agencies.

Full service community schools are jointly operated and financed by a school system and a community-based organization. They offer one of our best hopes for redesigning education to meet the needs of a modern, dynamic society.

For most of our history, schools have run on the agricultural calendar — when children worked on the farm after school and during the summer — not that of the Industrial or Information Ages. Today, typically both parents work and families are under stress. In particular, no one is home in those dangerous after-school hours when teenagers and even pre-teens get into the "new morbidities" — sex, drugs, violence, and suicide.

Schools are also crying for help. Educational requirements are becoming more rigorous as the society moves toward technical service. Schools need partners to help students — especially the growing numbers of immigrants with special

Joy Dryfoos is an independent researcher and writer supported by the Carnegie Corporation. Her most recent book is Safe Passage: Making It Through Adolescence in a Risky Society.

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Today, typically both parents work and no one is home in those dangerous after-school hours when teenagers may get into sex, drugs or violence.

learning needs — overcome barriers, and teachers must be free to teach, not to act as social workers.

As we have just dramatically learned, safety issues are also critical. Children and communities both require before- and after-school activities and havens. Many different sources of help are available, but they are often fragmented and inaccessible.

No Two Alike

Full service models fall on a continuum from one item "add-ons," such as after-school enrichment programs, to fully realized school transformations. All extend the school hours and are child-centered. Almost all are built on partnerships between the educational establishment and community services, universities, businesses, churches, libraries, museums, the police, and/or youth agencies.

About a decade ago the Children's Aid Society in New York City and a community school district developed schools with an array of before- and after-school, evening, and summer activities. New ideas have always been welcomed. In one example, students and parents teamed up to help precinct policemen learn Spanish, the neighborhood language.

Under Beacons, another New York program, community-based agencies receive grants to go in and "light up the schoolhouse" by extending hours to offer programs. The range of activities is practically limitless: African dancing, health clinics, job training — whatever makes sense to the neighborhood.

States have also jumped in. Missouri, Iowa, and Florida — a pioneer — have programs to coordinate the work of numerous service agencies in local schools. New Jersey focuses on creating youth programs such as after-school recreation and high school counseling. In Colorado, Connecticut, and Washington, state funds go for family resource centers in schools.

Foundations such as The United Way, C.S. Mott, and Dewitt Wallace Readers Digest have invested heavily in creating, evaluating and replicating community school models.

Under the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC), initiated in 1998, about 1,600 schools now have after-school services to improve achievement. This program is expected to grow from $200 million this year, to $600 million in the next Department of Education budget.

Rough Spots

Educators and human services providers traditionally run on separate tracks. To collaborate, schools must be willing to negotiate on issues like confidentiality, discipline, equipment, and transportation. Some educators are reluctant, while others welcome the infusion of support, energy and imagination.

To help, pioneers in the community school field are working to make technical assistance available to school and community groups eager to try. They've determined that it's essential to have a full-time coordinator on the site along with the principal.

No one in the field believes that existing education dollars should be spent on human services. Many resources already exist that can be used for pieces of these school transformations, including Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. States are committing dollars from sources such as child health insurance, tobacco settlements, and welfare reform.

Does it pay off? At least 16 different evaluation efforts are under way, and the preliminary research looks encouraging. The research shows improved achievement, much better attendance rates, lower delinquency, and significant student and parent approval.

Community leaders and parents at the local level are enthusiastic — they want those school buildings open. A newly formed Coalition for Community Schools has enlisted 91 national organizations to raise the visibility of successful models, organize technical assistance, and stimulate research.

The Littleton, Colo., shooting has provoked considerable discussion about such issues as gun control, parental responsibility, and Internet monitoring. Little of that talk has been about hands-on support services that might make a real difference in preventing high-risk behaviors. Full service community schools, with extended hours, can address these needs, enhance student learning, and add to the quality of life in many communities.

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The appropriate technology

Twenty-one seniors from Union City will be attending top-tier schools this fall, including Brown, MIT, Yale, and Berkeley. Many more are headed to other top schools.

How a low-income New Jersey school district combined new technology with system-wide reform to achieve a remarkable turnaround.

by Andrés Henríquez

ACROSS THE HUDSON RIVER, A SHORT DRIVE away from midtown Manhattan, fourth-grade students file into classrooms and head for their seats, five to a table. As they settle down, their teacher calls up the first group of students for a social history multimedia presentation. The students' computer screens light up with a variety of windows containing directories of students' work and of the library's central catalog, with toolboxes for graphics and multimedia production. One team presents information on heroes of the 1960s, while another group has chosen science and technology of the 1960s.

The well-produced multimedia presentations contain original research; news footage, clips from documentaries, still pictures, excerpts of interviews, and speeches given by civil rights leaders, all from the Internet; and graphics representing demographic and other statistical data. The teacher has also encouraged students to include interviews with their parents and relatives about the '60s. Although the students have widely varying viewpoints, their collaboration encouraged revisions which made their work more sophisticated and discerning.

Welcome to Union City, N.J.

Union City is one of our most densely populated cities — predominantly Cuban but with residents originating from the Caribbean, Central and South America, and Italy. Of the 9,000 students in the 11 public schools, 75 percent do not speak English at home, and 14 percent have been in the country for less than three years. In 1989, Union City was the third-worst-performing district in New Jersey — it failed 44 of 52 performance indicators and was threatened with a state takeover unless a radical and

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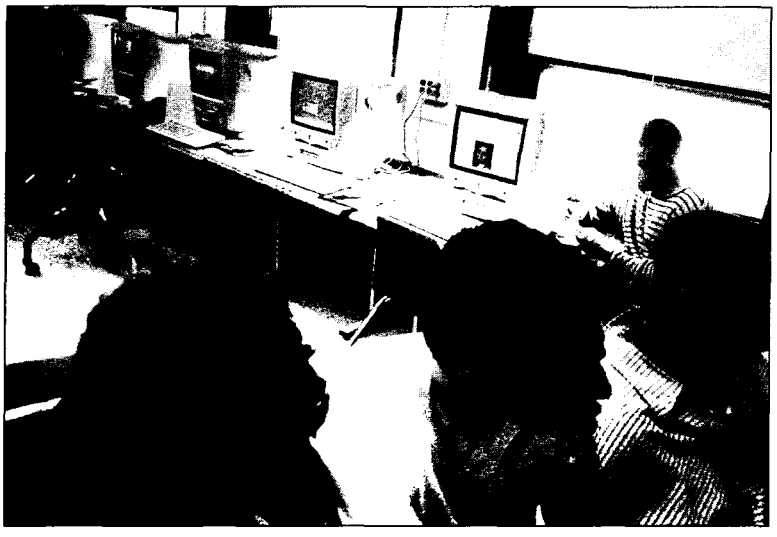
successful restructuring was implemented within five years.

In the next eight years, however, the district was transformed into the state's top-scoring special-needs district by a new superintendent, Tom Highton, and the director of academic programming, Fred Carrigg. New technology was the innovation that made the biggest impact, and other bureaucratic changes made the reform comprehensive. For example, district leaders made literacy the foundation of the reform efforts. They also provided time for teachers to plan and collaborate during the year and throughout the summer and made a clear commitment to high standards for both students and teachers.

Below, Union City students: While technology, in isolation, *never creates substantial* changes in schools, it can be a powerful learning tool when coupled with systemic reform.



Student writing skills improved using e-mail exchanges with friends and teachers, while teachers gained a deeper understanding the students' lives and cultures.

In 1992, through a partnership with Bell Atlantic, computers with telecommunications capabilities were distributed to all 135 seventh-graders and their families in the Christopher Columbus Middle School. "Project Explore" students and families immediately took to these tools — they became a hub of family and school activity. Students' writing skills improved with the heavy use of word processors and e-mail exchanges with friends and teachers. These exchanges also allowed teachers to gain a deeper understanding of the lives and cultures of their students. They became more committed to building upon students' prior knowledge and to engaging students with creative, inquiry-based curriculum. Project Explore students quickly showed signs of radical academic improvement, including large gains on standardized tests for reading (87 percent passed in 1995, up from 54 percent in 1992), math (79 percent in 1995, up from 29 percent in 1992), and writing (85 percent in 1995, up from 43 percent in 1992).

As they moved into high school, Project Explore students emerged as classroom leaders. Honors classes were added to accommodate the growing number of high-achieving students. Given the success of Project Explore, in 1995, the National Science Foundation (NSF), helped extend the telecommunications infrastructure throughout the district.

The following summer, the district instituted a Computer Applications Mentoring Project with the idea of teaching high school students to develop web sites for local community-based agencies (including the Mayor's office and the Department of Housing). As part of the program, a group of Project Explore students taught teachers about new technology while teachers helped students research and synthesize the information. Students gained a sense of civic responsibility while learning new skills. City officials, meanwhile, gained awareness of a new kind of student coming out of the local schools — a more critical and articulate student than they had known in the past.

To encourage the students' further achievement, district administrators, with funding from the NSF, began a Road to College program, which introduced students to college life and education through visits to universities around the Northeast. This fall, 21 seniors, including a number of Project Explore participants, will be attending top-tier schools, including Brown, MIT, Yale, and Berkeley. The top 40 students graduating this year received a total of 63 acceptance letters from schools such as Rutgers, Purdue, and Villanova.

As a researcher and observer of the Union City and other reform efforts, the overriding lesson I've learned is that while technology, in isolation, never creates substantial changes in schools, it can be a powerful learning tool when coupled with systemic reform. The achievements of the Union City students re resent a model of success the whole country can appreciate.

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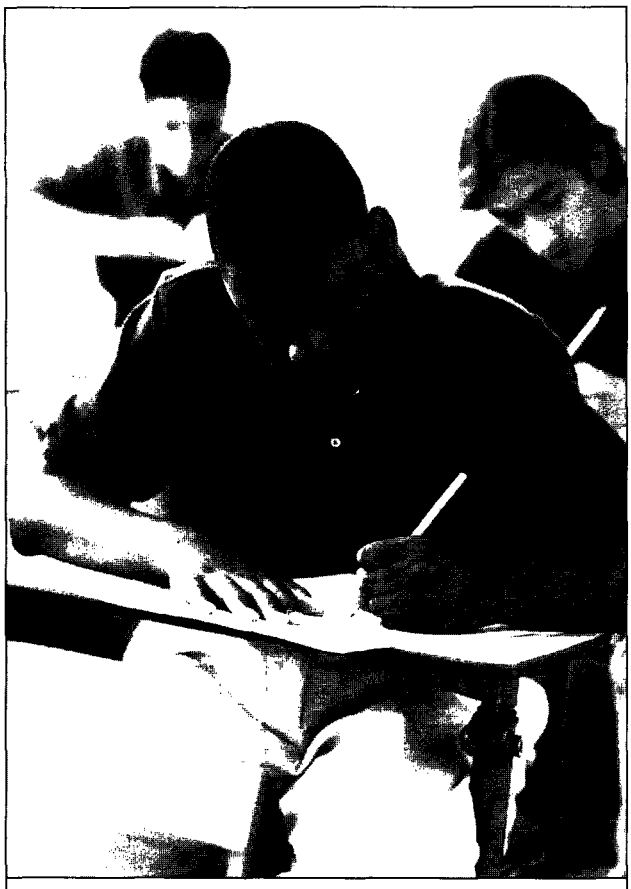
The many, the proud



The Army produces black leaders using a "supply side" model, rather than the typical "demand" version of affirmative action, which sets standards before the pool of qualified people is enlarged.

Rather than compromise standards to attain racial diversity, we must create opportunities to raise disadvantaged groups to meet high standards of competition. This army school does.

by Charles Moskos

In June 1997, President Clinton launched his much ballyhooed race initiative by taking issue with California voters' banning of racial preferences through Proposition 209. At a commencement address at the University of California at San Diego, Clinton spoke out forcefully in favor of affirmative action, claiming that the proposition would resegregate higher education. But his support for affirmative action presumed a lack of viable options. "To those who oppose affirmative action, I ask you to come up with an alternative," Clinton said. "I would embrace it if I could find a better way."

The fact is, there is a way to open the doors of educational opportunity to disadvantaged students without lowering admission standards or granting certain groups preferential treatment — and it exists right under the Commander-in-Chief's nose.

The U.S. Army has succeeded in producing black leaders by using a "supply side" model, rather than the typical "demand" version of affirmative action, which sets standards before the pool of qualified people is enlarged. Rather than compromise standards to attain racial diversity, we must create opportunities to raise disadvantaged groups — by no means all black — to meet the standards of competition. By establishing far-reaching educational programs that emphasize fundamental academic skills, the Army has created a model that has much to offer Americans concerned with higher education.

The U.S. Military Academy Preparatory School at Fort Monmouth, N.J., is the source for almost half of the black cadets who graduate from the Military Academy at West Point. The Prep School, as it is also called, is essentially a 13th year of high school. Its students are soldiers who otherwise would not be admitted to West Point. (Similar preparatory schools exist for the Navy and Air Force academies.)

Charles Moskos is professor of sociology at Northwestern University. With John Sibley Butler, he is the author of All That We Can Be: Black Leadership and Racial Integration the Army Way.

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The Prep School is no mere boot camp. SAT scores for both black and white students rise, on average, over 100 points after they have completed the curriculum.

The Prep School enrolls slightly over 200 students. About one in four is black. The student body is a mix of soldiers coming from the junior enlisted ranks of the active Army and recent high school graduates who have been rejected by West Point because of low test scores.

The program consists of a 10-month course of instruction. As would be expected, instruction is conducted in a military environment with additional emphasis on physical training and military customs. A typical "cadet candidate" day begins with a wake-up call at 5:30 a.m. and ends with taps at 11:00 p.m.

But the Prep School is no mere boot camp. Significantly, the curriculum is intentionally narrow, covering little other than reading, writing, and mathematics, to best help cadets rise to academic standards at West Point. SAT scores for both black and white students rise, on average, over 100 points after they have completed the Prep School curriculum.

The results of the regimen are impressive, particularly for African American students. In civilian higher education, an unfortunate side effect of lowering admission standards for students from disadvantaged backgrounds is that elite schools place some students into an environment where they fall behind or drop out. In the Prep School model, standards aren't lowered — performance is raised. And it works.

From 1994 to 1998, 84 percent of black West Point entrants who came from the Prep School graduated with their class four years later. This is an impressive statistic when we remember that the U.S. Military Academy has entrance standards comparable to those of our most selective civilian universities. But even more striking is that the black "prepsters" do better than white cadets — whose graduation rate is 79 percent — who were directly admitted to West Point. That young blacks who previously were not academically competitive can excel within one of the most selective admission pools in the country is an extraordinary story — a story with significant lessons for the American education system and its most tightly held orthodoxies.

The school at Fort Monmouth has lessons to teach both liberals and conservatives about higher education. Liberals must never lose sight of the necessary link between affirmative action and academic standards. Universities that admit the less qualified in the name of diversity only invite long-term disaffection. Conservatives have something to learn, too. The skill-boosting programs that produce such qualified minority cadets at West Point require a big commitment of energy and public resources. Equal opportunity doesn't come cheap.

The Prep School demonstrates that well-designed programs can substantially raise academic skills. It is time to consider how parallel schools can be established to expand the qualified pool for our civilian colleges and universities. Political and community leaders should work together to create a network of civilian versions of the Prep School — funded and run through partnerships between the federal government, states, universities, and businesses. Taking this step would affirm our faith in America's most basic creed: equal opportunity for all, special privileges for none.

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Diplomas that count

Since the Chicago Public Schools set promotion standards three years ago, students' performance is still below the national average, but standards are continually being raised.

Chicago has turned around one of the worst districts in the country. There are several reasons, but the one that whips heads around is the decision to end social promotions.

by Frederick H. Lowe

THE CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS SYSTEM WILL open its first newly constructed high school in 30 years this fall, North Side College Preparatory. More than 2,500 students have applied for 200 slots.

Gery Chico, president of the Chicago School Reform Board of Trustees, which sets policy for city schools, thinks the enthusiasm surrounding North Side College Prep demonstrates parents' renewed faith in the school system, the nation's third-largest. This is quite a turnaround for the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). Eleven years ago, the school system was called the worst in the country by Education Secretary William Bennett. Now it's being hailed as a model of achievement by President Bill Clinton.

Handling four key issues allowed the system's rebirth, Chico says. The first three: achieving labor peace with the Chicago Teachers Union, eliminating the CPS deficit, and initiating a new building and renovation program.

But the issue that has stunned educators whipping their heads around is the system's decision to end social promotions. Under social promotion, students are advanced to the next grade — sometimes because of their age or height — even though they have not mastered the basic skills of reading, writing and math in their current grade. For some time educators encouraged social promotions, arguing that retained students would be ridiculed by classmates. But Chico says that it made school diplomas worthless.

"It was absolutely meaningless," he says, making a sweeping gesture with his right arm. "The promotion standards were as loose as a goose. When a 25-year-old man can't read or write well enough to get a job, we have stigmatized him because we didn't help when we could have."

Frederick H. Lowe is a Chicago-based freelance writer. From 1995 to 1997, he was editor of Chicago Educator, *the newspaper of the Chicago Public Schools.*

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The promotion standards were as loose as a goose. When a 25-year-old man can't read or write well enough to get a job, we have stigmatized him.

The new policy, established three years ago, set guidelines for promotion from the third, sixth, and eighth grades. It gave teachers and principals the right to advance a student based on several criteria, including grades, attendance, and reading and math scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills.

For example, at the end of the school year, all of the third-graders take the math and reading portions of the Iowa test. In order to graduate, a student must score at least a 2.8 in math and reading. This means the third-grade student is reading or performing math problems at a second-grade level in the eighth month of a 10-month school year. This is still below the national average of 3.8 on the Iowa, but Blondean Davis, the CPS chief of schools and regions, says that standards are continually being raised.

CPS also created a system to help students who fall behind. When a teacher notices the that a student is having problems, the boy or girl is given additional help throughout the year either by the teacher or by college students and retired teachers working as tutors. During the 1998-99 school year, 37,421 students were enrolled in the third grade. Of that number, 9,910, or 26.5 percent of students, didn't meet the school system's promotion standards by June.

As a result, they were required to attend six weeks of summer school, called the summer bridge program. For nearly two months, the students received intensive instruction in reading, writing, and math. At the end of the summer, they took the Iowa again. Some 4,401 did well enough to be promoted to the fourth grade.

But an additional 5,509, or 14.7 percent of third-graders, still didn't make the grade. They were assigned for a semester to transition classrooms, located inside most of the city's elementary schools. The students again received intensive instruction in reading, writing, and math but in a much smaller classroom setting. And at the end of the semester, they again took the test. This school year, 1,953 of these students did well enough to be promoted, but they must also attend summer school to catch up with fellow students who graduated on time.

An additional 3,556, or 9.5 percent, of third-graders will remain in the third grade. "In the past," Chico says, "all 9,910 students would have been promoted to the fourth grade because the school system didn't have any standards." The drill is similar for failing sixth- and eighth-grade students. (One exception: eighth-graders who are 15 before Dec. 1 are assigned to one of nine transition high schools.)

Chico admits the system isn't perfect. CPS recently decided to promote 442 students who were in danger of flunking for the third time. Most likely, they will be screened for placement in special education classes. The school system's tough love, however, has improved its image among the city's business community, politicians, and parents.

"In the past, school officials would have to go hat in hand to the legislature and beg for money," Chico says. "Now it's a love fest. The legislators come up to us and ask what can they do to help."

The improved school system also has instilled pride in employees and increased enrollment. Annual attendance has climbed to 91 percent, and the board recently reported its fourth consecutive system-wide improvement in Iowa test scores.

More importantly, the changes have started to restore parents' faith in the school system. In the past, parents often sent their children to CPS elementary schools, but when it came time for high school, they voted with their feet, enrolling their kids in a parochial school or moving to the suburbs.

With the opening of North Side College Prep, CPS officials say the pattern is reversing. A large number of applications came from students who graduated from Catholic elementary schools.

The changes also have helped to restore CPS teachers' faith in the school system. "The teachers wanted tougher standards," Davis says. "Mayor Daley never wavered in his commitment to improve the schools, and his determination has made things very different."

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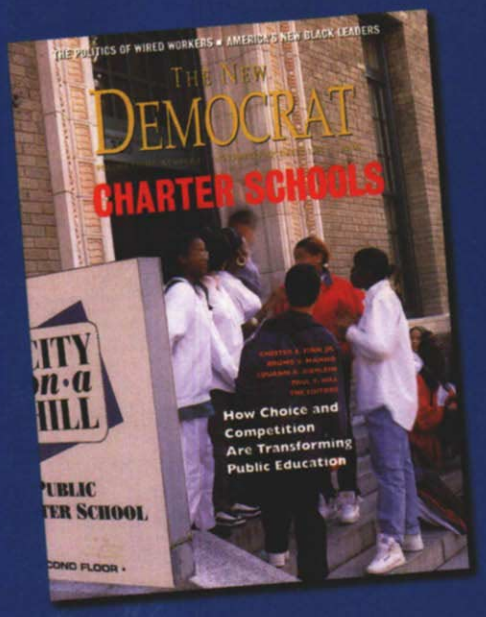
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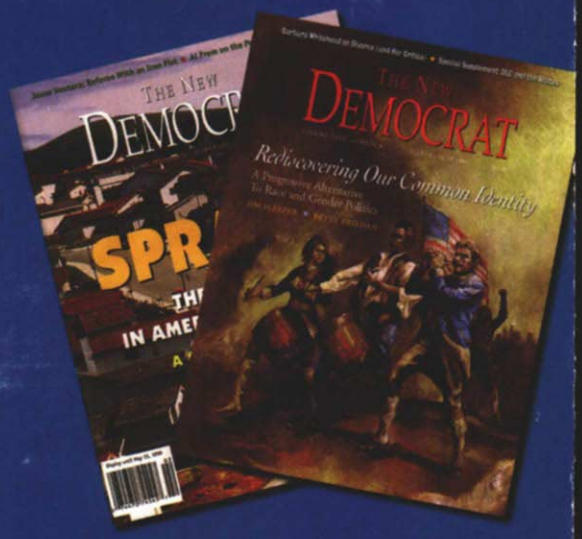

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